

Legacy of an Andersonville Survivor:
The Life of George Washington Steenrod

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The Division of Social Sciences
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Master of Arts

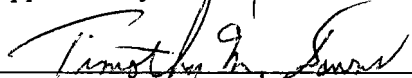
by
Amy Louise Waters

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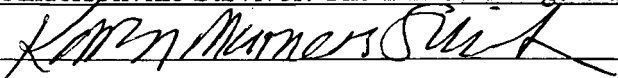


Approved by the Division Chair



Approved by the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Legacy of an Andersonville Survivor: The Life of George Washington Steenrod
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The American Civil War has left a legacy that compares to no other in the history of the United States. This conflict between the northern and southern states still influences America, even 135 years after Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox. It has become popular to look at one's own history for ancestors who fought for the Union or the Confederacy in the war. My own family history has led me to a Great-Great-Great-Grandfather who not only fought for the Union, but who was also one of the 45,000 Union soldiers who spent time in the most infamous Civil War prison, Andersonville.

George Washington Steenrod was one of many men who recorded their experiences while fighting in the Civil War. The diary he kept throughout the year 1864, including his time in Andersonville, is not extensive, but is instead a simple timeline of his life and notes about the people who were closest to him. However, George Steenrod's life is not completely defined by his time in Andersonville, his story includes what he accomplished after the war was over. Steenrod's relocation to Kansas and his success in cultivating a farm, building a town, and conducting a thriving business are a way to demonstrate how the horrors of war were not all consuming. It was in Kansas that George and his wife raised a family and became well-known members of the Colwich and Sedgwick County communities. George Washington Steenrod's story is not just about surviving the war and Andersonville, but is also the story of a man who made his life one worth saving.

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I acknowledge the Kansas State Historical Society for giving me access to George Steenrod's diary and New York and Kansas records. I acknowledge the Andersonville Prison Historic Site for allowing me access to the records of the library.

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Jennifer and Steve, thank you for helping in the summer of 1999, and for always bringing me back to reality.

Kevin, you drive me crazy, but you always showed an interest in George Steenrod and all the other names on the tree.

My parents, Dad for always saying okay, even though he knew it would somehow cost him money. Mom, thank you for giving me my love of history and for always encouraging me. To both of you, thank you for not only giving me Andersonville and Gettysburg, but everything in between.

All of the other ancestors who fought in the Civil War: Silas Chapman, William C. Davis, Thomas Larason, Benjamin McCullough and George O'Daniel.

I thank Charles Steenrod, for giving the ultimate gift to his country, his life. There are no words to express the thanks I feel for George Washington Steenrod's life. His life is a constant source of inspiration and amazement, and I am proud to call him grandfather.

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Introduction

In the summer of 1999, I was given the opportunity to take a trip up the Eastern Seaboard of the United States from Georgia to Pennsylvania. On this trip I visited some of the most revered and well-kept battlefields of the Civil War. These included: Manassas, Antietam, Fredericksburg, and the most famous Civil War battlefield, Gettysburg. However, this trip was about much more than just visits to battlefields. This trip took me to Andersonville, Georgia and the Civil War prison site that is located there. As a long time genealogist, I have experienced the joy of finding long-lost relatives and names that could lead me to new information. But the Civil War prison site at Andersonville, Georgia gave me a chance to experience my family history in a whole new way.

When I began my search for my own family history I was lucky enough to have an uncle start me out on this journey. He was able to give me all kinds of information and inadvertently gave me the foundation of this thesis. In a box of family mementos he had a transcript of a diary kept by George Washington Steenrod, my great-great-great-grandfather. The diary is the work of an eighteen-year-old boy who was with the 85th New York Volunteer Infantry in 1864. This diary includes the time that my ancestor spent in the most dreaded of all Civil War Prisons, Andersonville. The diary, now kept at the Kansas State Historical Society in Topeka, Kansas, has been on its own remarkable journey. It traveled from the coast of North Carolina to Andersonville, back up the Eastern Coast to New York and again on a journey West from New York to Kansas. This small brown diary gave me a link to a man I had never met, and allowed me to experience not only the Civil War, but the horror of Andersonville Prison.

The first time I held the diary I was awestruck, but that feeling was nothing compared to actually standing on the prison site. I was completely astounded by the idea that 40,000 men resided inside a field smaller than some parking lots. As a history student I have always wondered about what happened at a particular spot of land, and I have asked questions such as: how many different types of people had walked over the land, did anyone die there, did someone make love there, was someone born there. But now I was walking on land that had seen more death, illness, and suffering than is possible to imagine. This land had seen the worst that life could offer; the red soil of Georgia seemed a fitting tribute to remind me of the blood that had been lost to the earth. The silence of the place seemed to be mocking the noise of the 50,000 men that had passed through the prison stockade. The smell of clean air, green grass, and birds singing made it hard to imagine the stench of those men, the bare earth and the death that had once echoed in this spot.

I am by no means an expert on Andersonville, I do know more than the average person does, and more than the average history student does. My visit to Andersonville helped me to better understand the prison, and it gave me a clearer picture of the courage and fortitude that George Washington Steenrod possessed. George Steenrod was only one of thousands of men who survived the hell at Andersonville; he is by no means unique in that sense. I do, however, take pride in knowing that my great-great-great-grandfather did not turn on his fellow soldiers while in the prison and that his experience at the prison did not stop him from becoming a productive citizen.

George Steenrod was not content to merely live an uneventful life after his war experiences. He, along with his wife and children, became one of the thousands that

left their homes and traveled west to help settle the land. George Steenrod followed in the tradition of his great-grandparents, and helped to settle a county and form a new town. His life is about more than just his imprisonment, it is also the story of America after the brutal Civil War that ripped it apart for four long years. George was able to put the war behind him and build a life with his wife and four children. It was once said that the important part of gravestone dates is not the birth or death dates, but the dash in between those dates. George Washington Steenrod's dash spans seventy-five years and is filled with joy, pain, life, death and a remarkable amount of courage and fortitude.

Chapter 1 ❖ Allegany Roots

The family history of one particular individual is filled with many different people and many different circumstances. The making of a family tree goes on constantly, with each new generation adding a new and intriguing dimension. A family tree can show the movement of ancestors, and in America, this movement has usually followed a pattern of westward expansion. For many in the Western United States, the pattern of westward expansion can be traced in their family trees. The movement westward includes not just the common idea of the “West”, but also the continuing expansion of the United States western border since the Revolutionary War. This pattern can show small movement within a state or it can reflect larger movements that happened in the mid to late 1800’s. This pattern does not hold true for every family tree, because there are many circumstances that influence and make a family tree. In the case of George Washington Steenrod there is a definite pattern of Westward movement in the five decades preceding his birth in Western New York. This pattern is geographically limited in nature, but it can show just how several families can influence and impact the settling of a state and its counties.

The 1836 marriage of George Steenrod’s parents brought together the families of Elias Steenrod and Chester Scott, both of Allegany County, New York. Families of long standing in the Allegany County community, whose ancestors had come to the New World before America became a nation, were joined by this marriage. These two families were similar to thousands of others that helped to form the new nation before, during and after the Revolutionary War. The Steenrod and Scott families had

been part of America's formation and throughout the generations grew and changed, just as the nation was growing and changing.

In April 1806, Genesee County in Southwestern New York was divided into an original county and the three new counties of Allegany, Cattaraugus, and Niagara. The few settlers in the county decided on a county seat in Angelica, because of its central location in the county. The county jail was completed in the first few years, while the county courthouse was not completed until 1819.¹ Among the earliest settlers in the county were George Steenrod's paternal grandparents, Aaron and Sarah Axtell, who settled in the three-year-old county in 1809.² Aaron Axtell had come to the county from Otsega County, New York where he had also been a pioneer settler. Axtell had also spent time in Delaware County, New York with his brother Moses Axtell, who was a Boston Tea Party and Revolutionary War veteran.

As one of the first settlers in the county, Aaron Axtell and his family were included in the 1810 census of the county. In this census the four-year-old county had a population of about 2,000 settlers. By 1814 that population had doubled to nearly 4,000 settlers.³ In that census would be counted George Steenrod's maternal Grandparents, Chester and Abigail Scott.

Chester Scott and his family came to Allegany County and settled in the part of the Caneadea Township that would eventually become Friendship Township. Chester Scott, Sr. and his wife came to the town of Friendship in 1814 from Cheshire County, New Hampshire.⁴ Chester came with several of his brothers, leaving behind a father who had fought in the Revolutionary War. Chester Scott married the former

Abigail Hackett in New Hampshire and in 1820, their daughter, Lydia Miranda Scott was born in the city of Friendship.⁵

On March 24, 1815 Friendship Township was derived from Caneadea Township.⁶ The Steenrod family would become one of the first settlers in the newly formed Friendship Township. Ebenezer and Lydia Merriman Steenrod, from Delaware County, New York, settled in the brand new township sometime before the first town meeting. Ebenezer would be the moderator at this first town meeting on April 17, 1815. He would also serve as the commissioner of highways during the first years of the township. Ebenezer built the first sawmill in the community and also built a mill for wool carding and cloth dressing in 1816.⁷ In 1816, Ebenezer's oldest son, Elias Steenrod, married one of Aaron Axtell's daughters. Elias' new wife, Sophia Axtell, was one of Aaron Axtell's several children who remained in Allegany County after marriage. This union between an Axtell and a Steenrod would not be the last of its kind that the Friendship community would see. The young Steenrod family, now firmly settled into the Friendship community, began to grow in number. Elias and Sophie had four children, their oldest son, Washington Merriman, would marry Chester Scott's daughter.

The children of the Scott and Steenrod families grew up together in the townships of Friendship and Wirt. Therefore, the marriage between Washington Merriman Steenrod and Lydia Miranda Scott was emblematic of the continuing growth in the Allegany County community. The marriage of these two young people, who were brought together by the continuing expansion westward of a youthful American nation, would create five children: three boys and two girls. These three

boys, along with their two sisters would grow to adulthood in a nation riddled in conflict and strife. Chester, Sophia, George, Charles, and Lida Steenrod were descendants of men and women who had taken the challenge of moving into new territory and helping to settle it. This same challenge and the need for many to continue westward expansion helped to push America into a Civil War.

Allegany County, during the years that Washington and Lydia began raising a family, reflected the growing progress of the country and the political discord that had begun to grow between the North and South. During these years the population would begin to even out and the county became firmly settled. The county would also begin to see new trade routes, which helped to bring about new cultivation and established manufactories. Thanks to the progress and fortitude of their own parents, Washington and Lydia would raise their children in the same county they had been raised in, but the county had grown distinctly different by the time of children's births.

By 1820 the population of the county had almost tripled the population of 1814. The census reported a count of 3,834 in 1814, and by 1820 the number was up to 9,330. The population continued to rise, and by 1825 had doubled to 18,164. This continued growth raised the population to 26,276 by 1830, and jumped almost 10,000 by 1835 to 35,214.⁸

Allegany County's growth was aided by two new trade routes in the 1830's. In May of 1836, an act of the New York State legislature authorized the construction of the Genesee Valley Canal. This canal was used to transport lumber from both Allegany and Cattaraugus County. Work on the canal began in 1837 and 52 miles

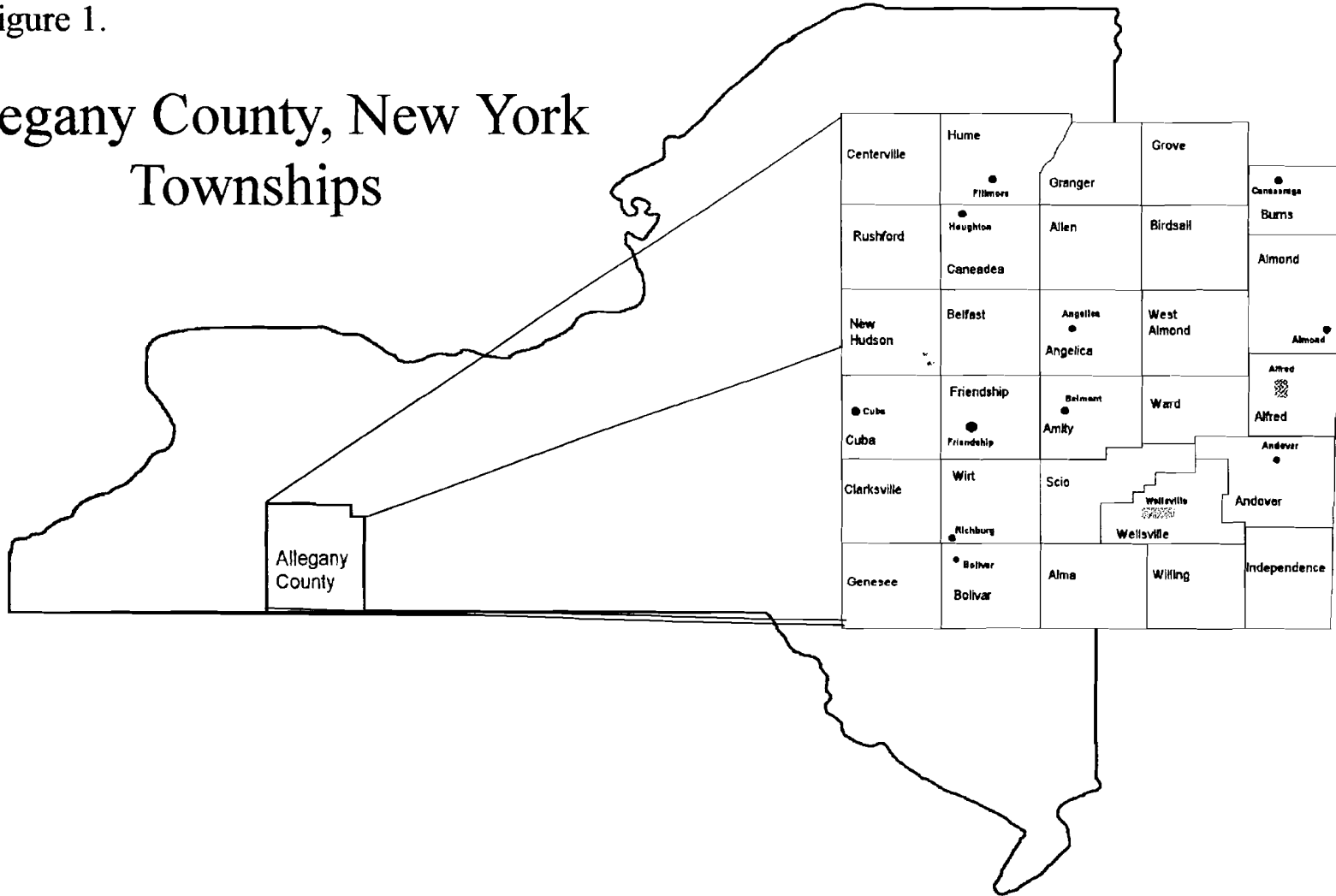
were completed by 1840. The canal went through the townships of Hume and Caneadea and reached Belfast in 1853, later continuing on through New Hudson and Cuba.⁹ The county also began to take advantage of the “iron horse,” and a railroad committee was selected to plan for a line. In 1833 work on the New York and Erie Railroad started in the county. Unfortunately, the railroad would not see completion until 1851, due to suspended work in 1842, which did not resume until 1849. The railroad would run east to west in the county and would go through townships: Almond, Alfred, Andover, Wellsville, Scio, Amity, Friendship, and Cuba. The line would have several stations, including one in the city of Friendship.¹⁰ By 1840, Allegany County had grown to include 29 townships, and although the county is not quite a square, 20 of the townships are squares. The square township of Friendship is located in the Northeast corner of the Southwest quadrant. (See Figure 1)

In 1845, Allegany County’s population of 40,000 had over 75,000 acres of land under cultivation. On these acres of land were grown wheat, barley, corn, oats, potatoes, peas, and flax. This land was also used to raise and utilize almost 20,000 head of neat cattle and 8,000 cows. This livestock helped in the production of over 500,000 pounds of butter and 300,000 pounds of cheese.¹¹

Politically, Allegany County and most of the North, were experiencing change in the 1840’s. Allegany County settlers “were, in the main, New England in origin, and naturally anti-slavery in sentiment.”¹² In 1846, Allegany County’s U.S. Congressman was Martin Grover, a Whig and free-soiler. Grover was against the expansion of slaves into the territories, but he was not an abolitionist. Grover, typical of the time, had little faith in the ability of the African American to achieve any

Figure 1.

Allegany County, New York Townships



success in American society.¹³ On the other hand, a young newspaper editor, A. N. Cole, was not only against the extension of slavery into the territories, but was an abolitionist. Cole, who started the *Genesee Valley Free Press* in autumn 1852, had a following of about 300 former Democrats. Cole's paper was a "fearless, outspoken, progressive newspaper devoted to early and old time principles of the Republican Party, and to the more advanced ideas of those later denominated Liberal Republicans."¹⁴ Allegany County, not quite ready for all of Cole's ideas, was moving closer to the ideals of the newly emerging Republican Party by the fall of 1854. This party was based on the idea of containment, rather than the abolition of slavery. At this time an Anti-Nebraska meeting was held, and on October 17, a Republican convention was held in Angelica. This convention had been called for in Cole's *Genesee Valley Free Press*, and was the first call for a Republican Convention in the state of New York.¹⁵

Cole printed in his newspaper the letters of former Allegany settlers, now settled in Kansas, to show "Bloody Kansas." As early as 1853, Allegany County families had settled in Kansas territory, and were engaged in the fight to keep Kansas free-soil. To bring this fight to life for the people of Allegany, Cole used his newspaper to print letters "sent from sons and daughters in the midst of the border ruffian wars of the frontier."¹⁶

Allegany County became a Republican Party county by the time of the 1856 Presidential Race. The party's platform was based on the idea of excluding slavery from the territories, and its candidate for President in 1856 was the ardent Free-Soiler John C. Fremont.¹⁷ In the Presidential election the citizens of Allegany County voted

overwhelmingly for the party's two candidates, Fremont and Dayton. In the relative number of votes cast, Allegany County cast more votes for Fremont, than any other county in the state. Because of the strength of the Republican Party, the Democratic Party in Allegany County had virtually disappeared in several towns by 1856.¹⁸

The years that George Steenrod, his siblings, and cousins spent growing up in Allegany County were marked by change. This applied not only to the changing face of the county and the change in politics, but in the progress of agriculture. The county that had been settled by their grandparents had significantly changed and their country was approaching its most crucial test in democracy. The conflict growing in the nation concerning the extension of slavery into the territories would force a Civil War and for George Washington Steenrod and his younger brother, Charles, this war would end their childhood and make them into men.

Chapter 2 ❖ Farmboy to Citizen Soldier

The tension that gripped America throughout the years that George Steenrod was growing up would explode into war just as he was on the precipice of manhood. Western New York had voted overwhelmingly in November 1860 for the election of the Republican Abraham Lincoln, an election that gave the South cause to secede and revolt against the Union. The months following the election showed the North just how desperate the South had grown. The secession of South Carolina in December, followed by the quick secessions of Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and finally Texas helped to show the North that the South was willing to take things into their own hands. While the Upper South teetered on the brink of secession in the months that followed, the seceded states made their desire for a new and separate nation abundantly clear when they inaugurated Jefferson Davis as President in late February 1861.

George Washington Steenrod, the middle child of Washington and Lydia Steenrod, was just fifteen when the batteries around Charleston Harbor opened fire against Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861. This event, preceded by years, months and days of tension, would set in motion events that forever changed the nation. The surrender of Fort Sumter on April 14, by Major Robert Anderson, along with the actions of the Lincoln administration, helped to push the Upper South States into secession. It would take Virginia only three more days to separate from the Union, with Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee following shortly thereafter.

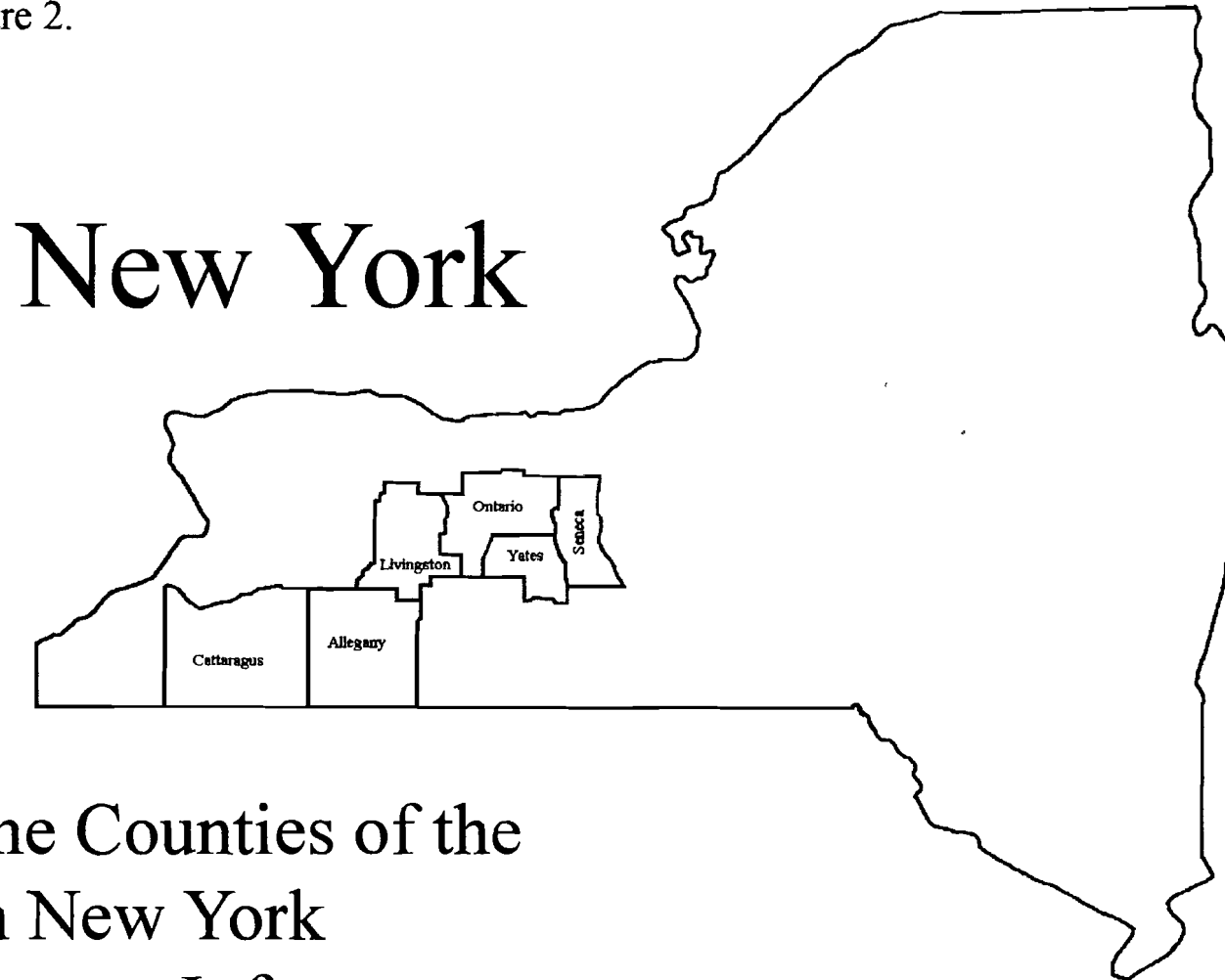
New York was one of several northern states that responded to Lincoln's call for 75,000 men to help in putting down the rebellion of the South. The New York state legislature responded to the firing on Fort Sumter by passing a law that made 3 million

dollars available for the state to recruit and equip a militia. New York would be the second free state to act, calling for a quota of 13,280 men to fill its ranks. This initial number would grow to 109,656 by May, and in July an additional quota of 59,705 men was called for.¹ This call came during the same month that the Confederacy had a substantial victory at Manassas (Bull Run), Virginia. This battle, and the ending of the three-month enlistments from the spring, caused Lincoln to issue another call for troops. This time the troops were not enlisting for three months, but for three years. The Southern insurrection had become a full-blown rebellion against the United States.

Activities during the summer months of 1861 were similar all over the country. The southwestern portion of New York was no different from other parts of the North when it came to the recruitment of young men into the army. In most cases the recruitment of companies occurred by towns, villages, or hamlets. That is exactly how the 85th New York Volunteer Infantry (NYVI) was recruited into service. In particular, the company George Steenrod enrolled in, Company C, was recruited primarily in Friendship Township, where he had lived his entire life. The 85th New York Volunteer Infantry grew to ten companies, most of which were recruited during the summer and fall months of 1861 in the southwestern part of New York State. The companies came from the counties of: Allegany, Cattaraugus, Livingston, Ontario, Yates, and Seneca.² (See Figure 2)

The majority of Company C's roster had been filled by August and September of 1861. George Steenrod was one of the last members who enlisted in the company, undoubtedly influenced by watching many of his friends and other men of Friendship Township enlist. A member of George's own family, Chauncey Stebbins, had already

Figure 2.



Home Counties of the
85th New York
Volunteer Infantry

enlisted in Company C. Chauncey and George were second cousins, sharing a common ancestor in Aaron Axtell. Chauncey's mother was a sister to George's paternal grandmother, and Chauncey was more than ten years older than George. Chauncey's enlistment in the company occurred on September 2, a day when many of the young men in Allegany county became citizen soldiers.³

George Steenrod would have several difficulties enlisting in the army. He was Washington Steenrod's oldest son living at home, and as a farmer, Washington needed his sons to help him on the farm. George was also underage. In the fall of 1861 George Steenrod was only sixteen. It would take several years, and many battles, before the North and South would start taking young men under the age of eighteen. However, with so many men enlisting, it is not surprising that the sixteen-year-old was able to enlist in the company. George enlisted at Friendship on October 16, for three years and on his enlistment papers he listed his age as eighteen. In subsequent enlistment papers, George is described as 5 feet 10 inches tall with gray eyes, brown hair, and a light complexion.⁴

George's enlistment into the United States Army would bring quick good-byes to his parents and siblings. Washington and Lydia Steenrod, like so many other parents in Friendship and all over the country, watched as one of their children went off to war. For the Steenrod family, Friendship, New York and for the country as a whole, the next four years would be incredibly long and filled with fear. In the summer and fall of 1861, the nation, now separated by secession and war, had seen a small glimpse of the future that awaited many young men and their families. The time for talking and compromising had come and gone. The previous years and the fights that had occurred over the extension of slavery into the territories had brought about a fight between states' rights and the power

of the federal government. The growing concern of the deep South states about retaining slavery and the overall fear in the South that the federal government was misusing its powers had broken the nation in two. The United States of America, which had been declared independent by Colonials in rebellion against British authority, in effect an act of treason, had been forged in a war for independence. George's own ancestors had fought for the right to become a separate nation. George shared this history with many of the northern men he served with and the southern men he fought against. In an ironic twist of fate, it would be George and his brother Charles, descendants of revolutionary separatists, who, along with their generation, were now going to fight for unity, not separation. They were taking up arms because of the belief that secession by the Southern states was unconstitutional. The lines of war had been drawn, and for many young men the war would bring battle, disease, imprisonment, and ultimately death.

George reported to the newly created military depot at Elmira, New York to be mustered into the then unorganized 85th NYVI. The locally recruited companies were assigned to specific barracks, with the enlisted men housed in one large room with bunks. The companies that would become the 85th NYVI were housed at a camp called Barracks No. 4.⁵ The new recruits were mustered in when they reached Elmira, and George was mustered into Company C on October 21, 1861.⁶ The first days at Elmira included not only the mustering in, but the filling out of the Form for Examining a Recruit. The recruit would answer questions such as name, age, occupation, birthplace, and recruiter's name. This examination, presided over by the inspecting surgeon, would include medical questions asked by the surgeon. The questions involved such things as past illnesses, injuries or anything the surgeon felt was important to note. The surgeon would also

check each recruit's mouth to determine whether or not the recruit's teeth were strong enough to bite open powder cartridges.⁷ After the medical exam, the recruits would be issued clothing; in many cases the clothing had been cheaply made and was ill fitting. At this time, a complete outfit consisted of "2 caps, 1 pompon, 1 eagle and ring, 1 cover, 2 coats, 3 pair of trousers, 3 flannel shirts, 3 dozen drawers, 4 pair bootees (or 1 pair of boots and 2 pair bootees), 4 pairs of stockings, 1 leather sock, 1 great coat, 1 blanket, and 1 knapsack, haversack, and canteen with straps."⁸

The 85th NYVI was organized by the beginning of November, and most of the members of the regiment had been mustered into their respective companies. It had taken several months for the companies to be recruited and then removed to Elmira. The 85th NYVI would officially muster into the United States Army on December 2, 1861. The regiment consisted of ten companies, given letters A through K, excluding the letter J. The companies consisted of men from six different New York counties, but the regiment was predominately made up with men from Allegany County, and was known to be the "Allegany County organization."⁹ The regiment was assigned to Colonel Uriah L. Davis, who was assisted by Lt. Col. Jonathan S. Belknap and Major Abijah J. Wellman. All three men had enlisted in Elmira, and Wellman, who had recruited Company C and was their Captain for a short time, was born and raised in Friendship.¹⁰

The days preceding the official organization of the regiment took on the tone of monotonous camp life. The men were awakened early in the morning, drilled, and broke for breakfast. The rest of the morning would be spent in more drills, a break for dinner at noon, a brief rest in the afternoon, and then different drills would continue into the nighttime hours. The recruits would also be assigned to guard duty, a process that

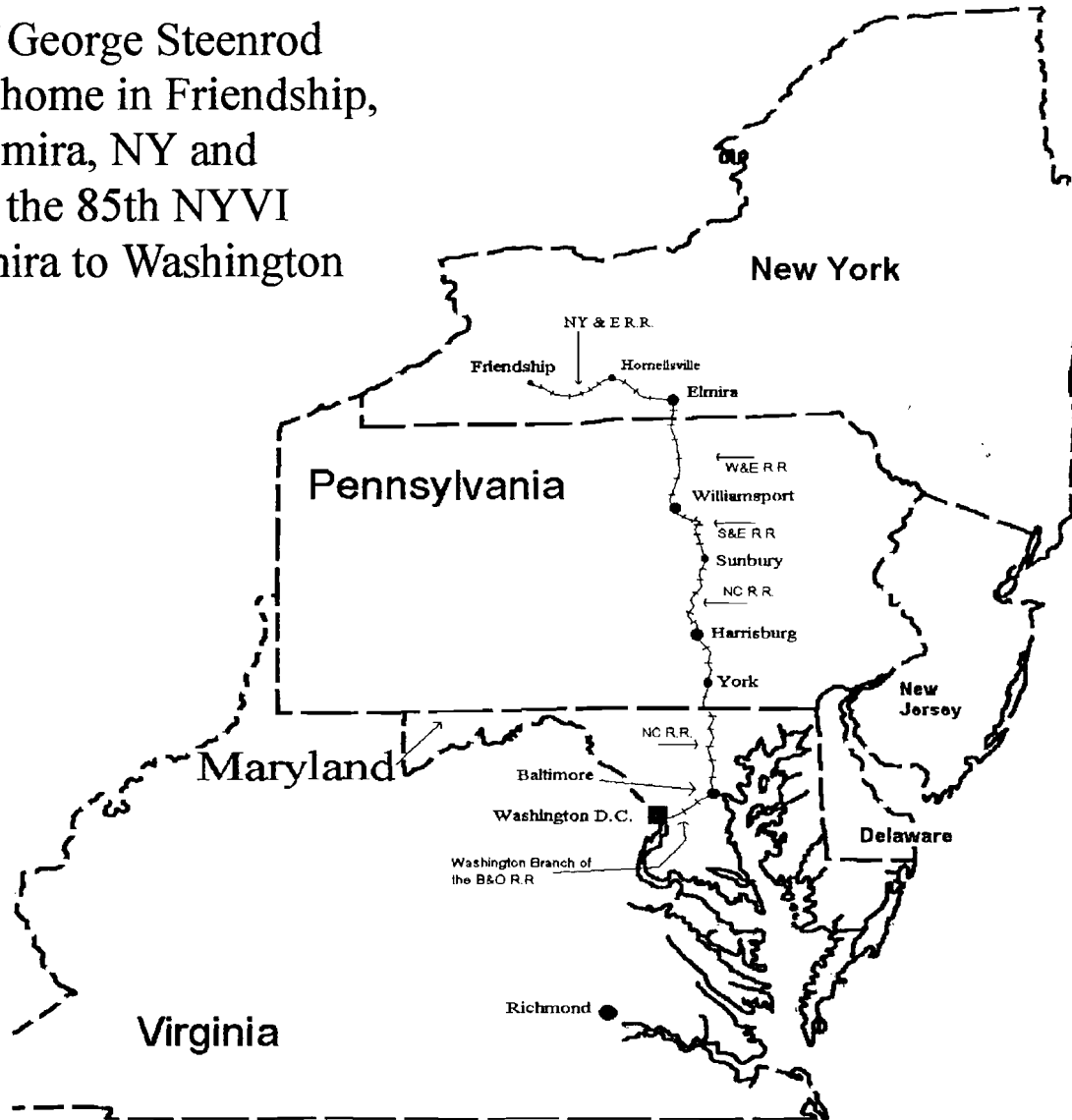
involved walking so many paces one direction and then doing an about face and retracing the previous steps. The recruits ate meals that consisted of boiled ham for dinner, and milk and mush for supper.¹¹

George, and the 85th NYVI, spent October and November drilling in preparation for war. December would be a month of great change and learning for the many new recruits. On December 1, the 85th NYVI was issued their equipment, which included knapsacks, haversacks, and canteens. They were also issued weapons for the first time. Companies A, B, and C were given Enfield rifles and the other companies received Belgian rifles. The men were also issued belts and cartridges.¹² The recruits were now drilling with rifles and equipment and the additional weight along with the cold weather was a new challenge. This challenge would be the first of many that were yet to come for George and the men of the 85th NYVI.

Two days after receiving their equipment, the 85th NYVI received its orders to leave for Washington D.C. The 85th NYVI headed to the capitol of the Union to drill and prepare with other regiments. The journey would be long and would involve travel through one of the nation's largest sectional cities, Baltimore, which was in the loyal slave state of Maryland.(See Figure 3) On December 3, around 4:00 p.m. George and the men of the 85th NYVI, marched to the railway station in Elmira as the regimental band played "The Girl I Left Behind Me." It would be three hours before the men boarded the train cars on the Williamsport and Elmira Railroad for the 78-mile trip south to Williamsport, Pennsylvania. The weather in early December consisted of low temperatures and regular snowfall. The long journey continued on the Sunbury and Erie Railroad line from Williamsport to Sunbury. In Sunbury, the men again changed railroad

Route of George Steenrod
 from his home in Friendship,
 NY to Elmira, NY and
 Route of the 85th NYVI
 from Elmira to Washington

Figure 3.



Railroad Abbreviations
 NY & E = New York and Erie
 W&E = Wilmington and Elmira
 S&E = Sunbury and Erie
 NC = Northern Central
 B&O = Baltimore and Ohio

lines, this time moving over to the North Central Railroad. They traveled through Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and on towards York, Pennsylvania. The journey had taken them through many small Pennsylvania towns, through Pennsylvania Dutch territory, and had shown many of these men the tallest mountains they had ever seen.¹³

The long ride continued from York, Pennsylvania into Maryland, a state that held alliances to both sides of the conflict. It was during this part of the journey that the men of the 85th NYVI experienced some jeering and stone throwing by southern sympathizers.¹⁴ The Confederate victory at Manassas had increased the level of anti-Union activity in the state, and Lincoln's fear of a seceded Maryland caused him to take drastic action. The arrest of thirty-one secessionist members of the Maryland legislature, and the election of a Union legislature in November of 1861, had calmed the state, but many of its citizens were still sympathetic to the Southern cause.¹⁵

Baltimore had seen several different regiments pass through the city. At first, many of these troops had been met with resistance, but pickets were now guarding the tracks, and an evening meal was planned for the 85th NYVI. After eating, the men marched about a mile to another depot in the city and boarded train cars on the Washington Branch of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. The 85th NYVI had traveled over 300 miles and while the journey was not over yet, the temperature had at least risen. This part of the journey would, however, be long and tedious. This particular rail line had been disrupted several times by Southern troops. It would be slow going because tracks might be torn up and the enemy might be shooting at the cars. The closer the men of the 85th NYVI came to the capitol, the more they began to see the presence of Union troops. Forts Lincoln, Thayer, Saratoga, Bunker Hill, and Mahan were now ringing the

city of Washington, and in between the forts were artillery batteries. The 85th NYVI arrived at the Washington D.C. station on New Jersey Avenue at around 10:00 p.m. ¹⁶

The journey from Elmira to Washington took fifty-one hours, and the men of the 85th NYVI were tired and dirty from the coal of the train smoke. The men were fed in a long shed called the “Soldiers Retreat” and after a short rest they marched two miles on the Bladensburg Turnpike to Camp Bladensburg.¹⁷ This was to be the first of many nights spent sleeping on the ground in a tented field. The romance of being soldier was now meeting the reality of living a soldier’s life.

George Steenrod and the 85th NYVI were now part of George McClellan’s Army of the Potomac. They began drilling and fighting in mock battles, along with exploring the city of Washington. On December 14, their division commander, Brigadier General Silas Casey, who was a West Pointer and a Mexican War veteran, reviewed the 85th NYVI.¹⁸

The months of December, January, and February were spent near Washington, drilling and waiting for war. This inactivity caused several problems, including drunkenness and desertion, which were affecting the regiment. The men were continuing to drill, and were frequently subjected to inspections by their officers. The highlight for many was the day they received their muster pay. The pay, however, was small for the lowest of the ranks, with the infantry privates, receiving just \$11 dollars a month. In and around Washington, as was the case in many places during the war, the soldiers paid inflated prices for tobacco, sugar, candles, and other small items.

The 85th NYVI faced the growing problem of disease while encamped near Washington. Measles had attacked the 85th NYVI during the journey from Elmira to

Washington. The camp was moved to a different location on Meridian Hill on the advice of Regiment Surgeon William Smith. The weather was also having an impact on the condition of the men. It had been raining off and on for most of the time that the 85th NYVI had spent near Washington. The rain not only made living conditions inside the tents difficult, but also helped to increase the rate of sickness. The 85th NYVI began to lose men from pneumonia, and other diseases as well as to desertion. The men were now becoming familiar with the real killer of men during the Civil War, disease. Smith attributed the problem of disease to the changing temperatures, poor soil, close quarters, and the ineffective efforts by the army to cope with winter chills.¹⁹ The men were constantly subjected to the weather, and were sleeping on the ground in their tents.

The 85th NYVI, along with other regiments camped near Washington, had been waiting for something to change. They had spent the better part of the winter drilling and waiting. The 103rd Pennsylvania and the 98th New York Volunteers' arrival in Washington was an indication that something was on the horizon for the Army of the Potomac. The 85th NYVI became even more aware of possible movement when the officers and non-commissioned officers were absent from camp for two days.²⁰

By mid-March, the men of the 85th NYVI had begun to grow restless and impatient with their lack of action. One of the reasons for the delay in action was McClellan's illness, and his demotion, by Lincoln, from general-in-chief of the army to commander of the Army of the Potomac. McClellan was also forced to abandon his original plans to move the Union troops down to Urbanna on the James River, and force the Confederate troops back to their capital, Richmond. The plan was abandoned because Confederate General Joseph Johnston had already moved his troops from

Centreville to south of the Rappahannock River. Johnston had also burned everything not on the road, including 10,000 bushels of corn. McClellan's new plan was to take his troops and move them down the Potomac to the peninsula between the York and James Rivers.²¹

McClellan was also dealing with General War Orders Number 2 and 3 issued by Lincoln on March 8, 1862. Both, Lincoln and the public were growing concerned about the large number of troops that were milling around the capitol. The new orders separated the Army of the Potomac into four corps, with a fifth to be formed later. In the orders, Lincoln withheld 35,000 troops to secure Washington by opening the Potomac and capturing enemy batteries. When the corps secured Washington, then and only then could McClellan take 100,000 men or two corps to Fort Monroe and come up the peninsula between the James and York Rivers to push the Confederates back into Richmond. The Corps commanders met at Fairfax Courthouse on March 13, and approved this plan.²²

There was a keen sense of anticipation in the camps around Washington following the meeting, and activity in the camps echoed this. There was an increase in drilling; an increasing build up of arms, and activity at the wharves increased. The army had commandeered and outfitted 113 steamers, 188 schooners and 88 barges.²³ Only four days after the meeting between the corps commanders, McClellan's army of 100,000 was ready to move out of Washington. Orders were issued to be ready to move at 10 o'clock for the march to Alexandria, Virginia. The men were told to take only one change of underclothes and a blanket, the rest was to be packed in barrels and boxes.²⁴ However, the sheer magnitude of moving an army so large and with so much equipment would take

time. It would take working around the clock for the Army of Potomac to be moved. This flotilla of 389 chartered boats were carrying 121,500 men, 14,592 animals, 1,150 wagons, 44 artillery batteries, and 74 ambulances.²⁵

The 85th NYVI would not become part of this flotilla until March 28. The 85th NYVI waited for their turn to go down the Potomac by continuing their drills. On March 21, Division Commander Casey and the newly promoted Brigadier General Innis Palmer reviewed the regiment, along with 13 other regiments. Palmer, a West Point man, had been a classmate of McClellan, “Stonewall” Jackson, and George E. Pickett. The 85th NYVI was not only reviewed by Casey, but by the Fourth Corps Commander, Brigadier General Erasmus Darwin on March 24. The waiting continued until orders were issued to the 85th NYVI on March 28, for them to be ready “at a moment’s notice.”²⁶

The 85th NYVI, along with the other regiments that had been given orders to march, left for Alexandria around sundown. They did not reach Alexandria until 2 a.m., and were forced to sleep in open fields without their tents during a snowstorm.²⁷ This snowstorm caused many men to become sick and disabled. All the excitement that had carried them through the wait and the long marches was beginning to crack. The war that so many had wanted was approaching quickly, and with it had come the realization that war was not full of glory.

The 85th NYVI boarded the steamer Elm City on March 30, and spent the night offshore. The following morning it headed down the Potomac to join the rest of the Army of Potomac. The journey would include passing by the home and tomb of General George Washington. The bell on the schooner tolled as they past the historic home of the

“Father of the Country.” It had to have been with a sense of irony that this occurred, after all, Washington had been a slave owner and a noted Virginian.²⁸

The 85th NYVI arrived at Fortress Monroe around daylight on April 1, 1862. They disembarked the ship around 10 a.m. and marched to Hampton, where Colonel Belknap halted them.²⁹ The 85th New York Volunteer Infantry had finally come face to face with the beast known as war.

The 85th NYVI was officially assigned to Palmer’s (3rd) Brigade, Casey’s (3rd) Division, Fourth Army Corps, Army of the Potomac. The men of the 85th NYVI were now under the command of Army of the Potomac Commander, Major General George McClellan, Fourth Corps Commander, Major General Erasmus Darwin Keyes, Third Division Commander, Brigadier General Silas Casey, and Third Brigade Commander, Brigadier General Innis Palmer.³⁰ On April 2, Palmer’s Brigade marched to Newport News, located on the tip of the peninsula between the James and York Rivers. The weather, while not as cold as that up North, was still causing problems for the men. A rainstorm started on April 2 and continued into the next day, causing the water around the camp to rise more than a foot. On the morning of the 4th, the 85th NYVI began to settle into their new home, which was in a peach orchard about one mile from the James River. It was possible from this location for the men to see the Confederate ironclad ram Virginia, which had been the former Federal vessel, the Merrimack.³¹

On the morning of April 5, marching orders were read to the Army of the Potomac for the battle which later became known as the Siege of Yorktown. McClellan’s plan involved taking his Army of the Potomac up the peninsula and move on Richmond. McClellan was marching his troops up the peninsula towards Richmond when he was

stopped at Yorktown. The 85th NYVI, along with the rest of Casey's division was forced to wait to join the army until April 16, when sufficient equipment and wagons were gathered.³² When the regiment finally left Newport News, Virginia, to join the fight at Yorktown, George Steenrod was unable to make the march.

Muster Rolls kept for the 85th NYVI show George Steenrod as being present with his regiment from January 1862 to October 31, 1862. It would be easy to assume that George Steenrod was with the 85th NYVI during the engagements they participated in at this time period. This however is not the case, and a letter written by George's mother, contains information regarding the whereabouts of her son during this time.(Appendix A) The letter, dated November 30, 1862, is from Lydia Steenrod to Surgeon General William A. Hammond. It provides an intricate piece of the puzzle that made up Private George Steenrod's life in the first two years of the war.

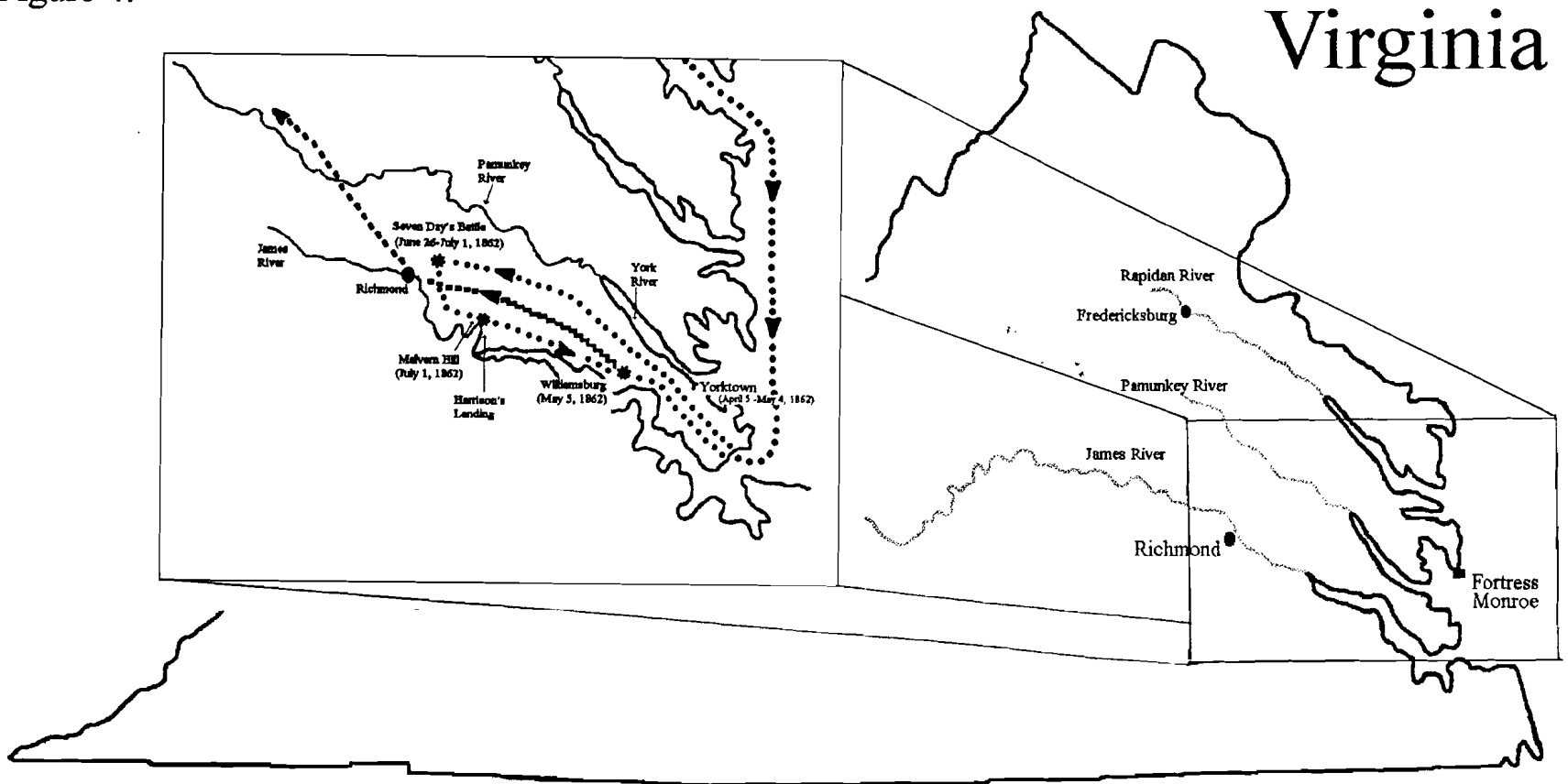
George had sustained some type of injury while stationed in Washington with the 85th NYVI and had come close to being discharged. The injury, thought by 85th NYVI Surgeon William Smith, to be some kind of muscle sprain, was not severe enough that George allowed himself to be discharged. This injury did not stop George from traveling with the 85th NYVI down the Potomac River to the peninsula. However, George could not escape the one thing that killed more citizen soldiers than all the battles combined. The weather conditions, the constant physical activity and the overall unsanitary conditions that George and his fellow soldiers lived in quickly became a breeding ground for illness. In Newport News, George Steenrod was struck with what his mother called the "scurge of the soldier," or what was better known as diarrhea. It was a case so severe

that George was unable to march with his regiment to Yorktown and was forced to follow along in their wake.³³

George was able to follow the army up the peninsula because it was a fairly small distance between Newport News and Yorktown and because the Army of the Potomac had been stopped near Yorktown to fight. Confederate Major General John Magruder's 11,000 men at Lee's Mill, Virginia, had stopped McClellan's march to Richmond. McClellan's army had been met with Confederate works that stretched across the peninsula from the Yorktown River at Yorktown to Mulberry Point on the James River. McClellan laid siege to Yorktown on April 16, and continued the siege throughout the following two weeks. While McClellan's army had been marching to Yorktown, Magruder had been reinforced by Confederate General Joseph Johnston's troops. McClellan's plan for battle on May 6 was stopped when Confederate troops withdrew on the night of May 3-4 and retreated towards Williamsburg. (See Figure 4) The Confederate defense at Yorktown had allowed Richmond time to reinforce its defenses. It would take McClellan twelve hours before he was able to gather his 118,000 soldiers and start the march towards Richmond.³⁴

The Army of the Potomac marched up the peninsula towards Williamsburg following the Confederate forces. On May 5, McClellan engaged Confederate forces at the Battle of Williamsburg and was able to force a confederate retreat towards Richmond.³⁵ In the days following the battle, the Army of the Potomac took a short break to wait for supplies and rest. It was this break, along with several others that allowed for George Steenrod and other sick men to catch up with the army. George Steenrod continued to play catch up with his regiment throughout the march up the

Figure 4.



Cities, Rivers and Battles that involve the
Army of the Potomac and the 85th NYVI.

peninsula. George, although ill, was still able to follow the army; some of his fellow infantrymen were not so lucky. It was now over a month since the 85th NYVI had landed at Fortress Monroe and ninety-seven men, or 11% of the regiment, had died or were in the hospital.³⁶

George Steenrod, only sixteen, and in a hostile country, continued to drag along after the Army of the Potomac as they made their way North. George was too ill to take part with the 85th NYVI in the fight at Seven Pines (Fair Oaks), Virginia, on May 31 – June 1, 1862. In this battle the 85th NYVI lost ten men, including Sergeant Marcus Crandall of Company C, and two other members of the company. The regiment also had 45 men reported wounded and twenty-one men reported missing, presumably captured and imprisoned.³⁷ The battle had done nothing to help the army move on Richmond, and had left the two armies at virtually the same locations they had occupied before the battle.

The 85th NYVI was one of the regiments that reorganized after the fighting at Seven Pines, due to the heavy losses that were suffered there. The 85th NYVI was moved from Palmer's (3rd) Brigade into the Second Brigade, with Brigadier General Henry Wessells as the commander.³⁸ The 85th NYVI and the Army of the Potomac spent much of June attempting to recover from the battle at Seven Pines and working to set up earthworks and felling trees for a clear field for artillery fire.

George, according to his mother's letter, was too ill to do his duties and continued to grow weaker throughout the weeks in Virginia. Meanwhile his regiment waited throughout June near the Chickahominy River and became engaged in the Seven Day's battle, on June 25. The Seven Day's Battle, as its name suggests, consisted of seven days worth of fighting, as the Army of the Potomac retreated towards the James River.

Confederate General Jackson started the battles at Oak Grove, where McClellan's army was able to gain six hundred yards when Confederate forces pulled back. This was the last time that McClellan's army would advance towards Richmond instead of retreat. Confederate General Robert E. Lee would bring the next assault on the Army of the Potomac at Beaver Dam Creek on June 26. This would be the final blow to the Union Army. McClellan's inability to gauge the correct number of enemy he faced caused him to make inept decisions. He was forced to begin a retreat towards the James River. The largest of the Seven Day's Battle took place on June 27 near Gaine's Mill, Virginia. The fighting continued all day and ended only when night fell. The fighting brought Lee his first major victory, but it cost him 9,000 soldiers, compared to the Union's 7,000.³⁹

On the night of June 27, the 85th NYVI under Keyes' command was ordered to retreat across a bridge built over White Oak Swamp. It was hoped that this could be done quickly and before daylight, but that became an impossible task. The poor condition of many of the men meant that many had to be loaded into ambulances or carried over; even the healthy were moving slowly. The sound of artillery fire and battle could be heard at all times during the day, with constant minor skirmishes.⁴⁰

McClellan officially issued orders for his Army of the Potomac to withdraw towards the James River on the night of June 27. McClellan believed his army was outnumbered and outflanked, and the confirmation that Confederate General "Stonewall" Jackson was in the vicinity sealed his decision to retreat. The Confederate Army engaged the Union Army at Garnett's and Golding's Farms on the 27th and 28th. This engagement cost the Union army 189 men, while Confederate forces lost twice as many.⁴¹

The army's slow moving retreat to the James River, hampered by the scarcity of few roads, 2,500 head of cattle, and the number of men and wagons, gave Lee the opportunity to continue attacking. On June 29, the Confederates engaged the Union at Savage Station. The battle ended in a stalemate, but the Confederate Army definitely came out ahead. They lost only 444 men, compared to 919 Union losses, and had captured a field hospital full of 2,500 wounded Union soldiers. The battle had also killed four out of five brothers from a family in Vermont. On June 30, the fighting continued at Glendale and White Oak Swamp. The fighting at these two sights produced high casualty numbers: 2,700 Union losses, and 3,600 Confederate losses.⁴²

The final battle, which utilized two armies numbering 160,000 men, occurred at a sharp rise called Malvern Hill, Virginia. Malvern Hill was fifteen miles from Richmond and only seven miles from the Army of the Potomac's new base camp at Harrison's Landing on the James River. The Army of the Potomac was able to hold off the Confederates due to confusion among Confederate Officers. This confusion cost the Confederate Army a chance to capture the Army of the Potomac and make a decisive stand for Confederate Independence. With the end of the fighting at Malvern Hill came a summer storm to unleash its fury on the surviving troops: "The howling of the storm, the cry of the wounded and groans of the dying...the ground slippery with a mixture of mud and blood, all in the dark, hopeless, starless night; surely it was a picture of war in its most horrid shape."⁴³ By July 2, the Army of the Potomac had withdrawn all of its troops to Harrison's Landing. McClellan's plan to move up the peninsula and capture Richmond had gained the Union Army little ground. The Union army had managed to

escape capture by Confederate troops and had brought about the fall of 20,000 Confederate soldiers, compared to their own loss of 15,849 soldiers.⁴⁴

At Harrison's Landing, George Steenrod was once again faced with a possible discharge from the army. The 85th NYVI surgeon, William Smith, sent him to obtain a discharge, but he somehow managed to once again evade a discharge. George Steenrod was only one of many who had become sick while traveling with the Army of the Potomac in the summer of 1862. Smith recounted in his written report that a third of the 18,000 troops that had retreated to Harrison's Landing were sick. Smith's diagnosis for the illness plaguing so many of the men was scorbutic diathesis (scurvy), with many of them suffering from diarrhea and fever.⁴⁵ Illness was only one of the problems with the Army of the Potomac in July. The men in the army were suffering from low morale and were disheartened by their failure to capture Richmond. The Army had succeeded in stopping the Confederates, but the cost had been great. One enlisted man wrote; "we have made an inglorious skedaddle or a brilliant retreat."⁴⁶ Withdrawal of the Union troops began to plant doubts in many of the soldier's heads about McClellan's ability to lead.

On July 4, the Army of the Potomac celebrated Independence Day by listening to McClellan give a speech, followed by the troops parading before him. The troops had cheered while listening to the band play the national airs and they had cheered at a national salute at the headquarters of the camp. It is of some interest to note that Wessell's Brigade was ordered not to cheer McClellan, although Massachusetts's men across the road did cheer the commander.⁴⁷ The reason behind Wessell's order was unclear to the men in his brigade, but it was accepted.

The month of July was spent camping at Harrison's Landing with sporadic, but inconsequential, fighting. The return back to camp life was monotonous and frustrating for many of the soldiers, with only a few highlights for the Army of the Potomac. President Abraham Lincoln visited the Army of the Potomac on July 8, and reviewed the troops with McClellan. The men were now enjoying fresh food, instead of the hated hardtack that had sustained them throughout the campaign of the peninsula.⁴⁸

After meeting with the newly appointed general-in-chief of the Army, Major General Henry Halleck, on July 25 and 26, McClellan had been left with the impression that his troops would stay near the James River. This was not to be the case, and on August 3, McClellan received orders to move his army to Acquia Creek in Northern Virginia. This was to help reinforce Washington due to Lee's new concentration of troops. The Army of the Potomac was headed back up the Potomac River through the Chesapeake Bay to Northern Virginia. However, the 85th NYVI, along with the rest of the Fourth Corps, would not be going back up the river. In a surprise move, the Fourth Corps was to be left at Yorktown. General Keyes felt his Fourth Corps had been left behind due to a personal conflict that lay between him and McClellan.⁴⁹

On August 16, the Fourth Corps started towards Fort Monroe at the bottom of the peninsula. This journey would take them back across the Chickahominy River, past Williamsburg and back into Yorktown. A short break was taken at Yorktown and then it was on to Fort Monroe, where they arrived on August 25.⁵⁰ The 85th NYVI and the Fourth Corps settled back into camp life. There were few bright spots at this time, with exceptions being when the corps received new clothes and were paid.

The 85th NYVI was in a transition phase during the months of September and October. After having spent September in Newport News, the 85th NYVI was ordered to Suffolk, Virginia. On October 6, the men boarded the steamboat *Express* and sailed across the James River to Norfolk, Virginia. They reached Suffolk on October 7, and begin to settle into their new home. The town of Suffolk bordered on the edge of the Great Dismal Swamp, home to wildlife and a natural breeding ground for mosquitoes.⁵¹ This new environment helped add to the growing list of men who were ill. The 85th NYVI would spend the months of October and November in camp near the city.

George Steenrod, who had managed to be present in the muster rolls throughout the entire peninsula campaign, was finally sent to the general hospital in Suffolk, Virginia. George's mother had grown so concerned about her son that on November 30, 1862 she wrote a letter to Surgeon General William A. Hammond asking that he look into getting her son discharged from the army. Lydia Steenrod was gravely concerned that her son would die in Suffolk if he was not discharged and allowed to come home. Lydia had previously written a letter to 85th NYVI Surgeon William Smith asking him to discharge her son. She had been hearing from friends of her son, and had even received a letter from 85th NYVI Lt. Col. Abijah Wellman who wrote that he was "firmly convinced that my son (George) could never be of any service in the army and it would require the comforts of home and a pure Northern atmosphere to restore him to health."⁵² At the same time, Major Rufus Scott and Captain Hutch of the 130th New York State Volunteers had attempted to procure a discharge for George. It is impossible to determine why George was not given a discharge, or just how ill he became. Official muster roll records

state that George Steenrod was left sick at Suffolk, Virginia on December 5, 1862 and that he was absent from the Regimental Return in December 1862.⁵³

Wessell's Brigade and the 85th NYVI were transferred from the Army of the Potomac to the Department of North Carolina commanded by Major General J.G. Foster. Foster ordered Wessell's Brigade to leave Suffolk on December 5, march to Gatesville, North Carolina, and from there, march two miles to the Chowan River, where Foster would meet them with transports. The brigade traveled down the Chowan River, into Albermarle Sound, past Roanoke Island, and into Pamlico Sound. The troops arrived in New Bern, North Carolina on December 9.⁵⁴

The purpose of the expedition was to destroy a major railroad bridge over the Neuse River at Goldsboro. General Ambrose Burnside, now commander of the Army of the Potomac, ordered Foster and his troops to burn the bridge and cut off Confederate communication from Richmond and disrupt the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad line. Foster's forces, were able to complete these tasks during the Battle of Kinston on December 14. Foster's forces pushed the Confederates north of the Neuse River and west towards Goldsboro. While retreating the Confederates had attempted to stop the Union forces by burning the bridge. Union forces were able to stop the fire and marched into the captured Kinston where they looted the city. On the way back to New Bern, the Union forces burned the bridge.⁵⁵ It would be almost two years before the 85th NYVI would be back at this very location, and it would be for a much different reason.

For the 85th NYVI the remainder of 1862 was spent camping near New Bern, North Carolina. In General War Order Number 84, Wessell's Brigade was transferred to the Department of Virginia and North Carolina Eighteenth Corps, Fourth Division. The

85th NYVI became part of the First Brigade, commanded by Brigadier General Lewis C. Hunt, Wessell was promoted to Fourth Division commander.⁵⁶

1862 had been a year filled with new sights, sounds, experiences, and loss. The men from the 85th NYVI had been through battle and had traveled thousands of miles away from their families and homes. For George Washington Steenrod the year had not been filled with war, but with the battle to stay alive and in the army. He had managed throughout his sickness to be present for the muster roll, and had not been reported absent until November and December 1862. His mother and the men around him had been deeply concerned that he would not survive the year. For George, 1862 had to have been the worst year of his short life. At the age of seventeen he was struggling to survive in a war, far away from home and incredibly ill. The passage of 1862, and the arrival of a New Year had to have brought some hope to his tired body. However, if George Washington Steenrod thought that 1862 was the worst year of life, he would be sadly mistaken.

Chapter 3 ❖ Thick of Battle, Monotony of War

The first full year of the war made one thing abundantly clear, the South was not going to break easily and the North was in for a hell of a fight. 1862 had seen battles at Fort Donelson, Pea Ridge (Elkhorn Tavern), Shiloh (Pittsburgh Landing), Antietam (Sharpsburg), Cornith, and Fredericksburg. These battles had produced big and small victories, with great losses on both sides. Total war losses (killed, wounded, missing) for both sides had already reached the 100,000 mark in 1862. The end of 1862 and the beginning of 1863 also marked the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation by President Lincoln. Lincoln announced in July of 1862, that he would sign a proclamation freeing the slaves in areas that were rebellious against the United States. This Emancipation Proclamation would go into effect on January 1, 1863. Lincoln had essentially freed the slaves in areas where he had no power to enforce it. Lincoln's proclamation extended only to those areas, because he believed he did not have the constitutional power to abolish slavery. This proclamation stunned and angered many in the North and many of its soldiers. For many Northern soldiers the war was not about slavery, it was about keeping the country united. It would take several months before soldiers in the Union army could begin to accept the change of war aims. Lincoln was motivated not only on moral grounds, but also by an effort to help the Union win the war. The freeing of slaves in Confederate areas meant more men to help in the North and more confusion and fewer laborers in the South. The Union army needed all the help it could get by the time 1863 rolled around. The winter of 1863 would be hard, with bitter weather and few signs of improving conditions. If North or South thought they had seen the worst the war had to offer, the coming year would once again prove them wrong.

There is little information on George Steenrod for the year 1863. There are no letters, as there were 1862, there is no diary, as there is in 1864. The only piece of information that puts George in the war are his Company Muster Rolls. In these rolls George is present for the entire year of 1863. However, this can not be a guarantee that George spent every day with the 85th NYVI. George had been present for every Company Muster Roll in 1862, except November and December, when he was finally admitted to the hospital. The information that is known about 1863 indicates that George was present for the Company Muster Rolls at the end of February, April, June, August and September. It is apparent that George had to have been recovering from his illness or the army would have discharged him from service. A small hand written note from the Medical Directors Office in Suffolk, Virginia backs up this assumption.

The letter that Lydia Steenrod wrote to Surgeon General William A. Hammond was, amazingly, responded to in a very short time. The letter was received at the Surgeon General's office on December 5, 1862 the same day official records show George entering the hospital in Suffolk. On December 6, the letter, by order of the Surgeon General was forwarded by U.S. Army Assistant Surgeon, C.C. Byrne to D.W. Hand, United States Volunteers Medical Director, Suffolk, Virginia. Hand replied to the Surgeon General with a small note written on the back of the forwarded letter. (See Figure 5) The note claimed that George was recovering from a long sickness and that he was doing well. Hand also noted that 85th NYVI Surgeon William Smith was a good surgeon, who would do right by George.¹

This note indicates that George was beginning to recover from the diarrhea and dysentery he had been suffering throughout 1862. In the letter that Lydia Steenrod wrote

Typed Version of Hand's Letter:

Head Qtrs Suffolk Va
 Med. Directors Office
 Dec 11th 1862

The young man G.W. Steenrod is apparently recovering from a long sickness - Is doing well and cheerful - His Surgeon is one of the best in this command and will surely do right by him.

D. W. Hand
 Surg. & Med. Director
 Peck's Division

Copy of letter from the Military Records of George W. Steenrod.

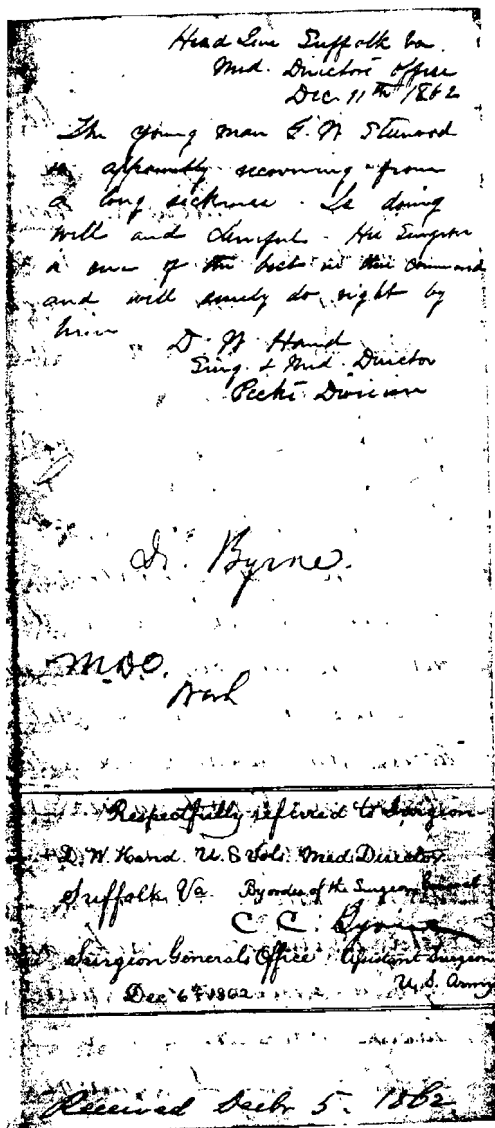


Figure 5.

Response letter of Peck's Division Surgeon and Medical Director (D.W. Hand) to United States Surgeon General (William Hammond) in regards to the welfare of Lydia Steenrod's son, Private George Steenrod, Co C. 85th NYVI.

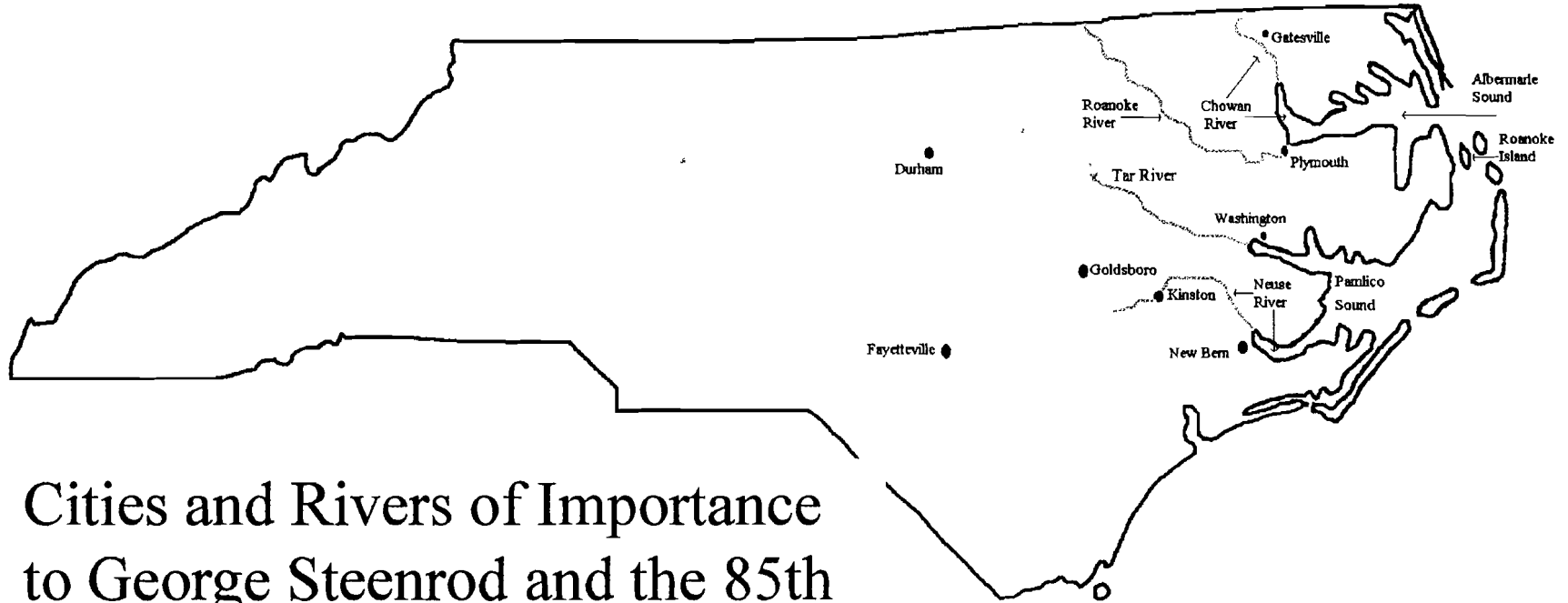
to the Surgeon General she claims that part of the reason her son could not receive a discharge was because of Surgeon Smith and the Medical Director. According to 85th NYVI Lt. Col. Abijah Wellman, the number of soldiers discharged because of illness disgusted the Surgeon. Smith was refusing to discharge the men of the 85th NYVI because too many other Surgeons were discharging well men.² It is impossible to know what Smith thought was necessary for a discharge, but he did give medical discharges. One of the men mentioned in the letter, Daniel Parker, who had spoken to Lydia Steenrod about her son, was given a medical discharge in September of 1862.³ At the end of her letter, Lydia Steenrod mentions another young man, a Joseph R. Parker, who had not spoken since July of 1862. Parker, most likely suffering some sort of psychological war trauma, was given a medical discharge in February of 1863.⁴ It seems that from all accounts, George Steenrod should have been discharged, but for some unknown reason he was kept in the army.

George Steenrod was well enough to catch up with the 85th NYVI by the end of February. George was present for the January-February Company Muster Roll that was called on February 28, 1863.⁵ It is unclear how he caught up with the 85th NYVI, who at this time were located in New Bern, North Carolina.(See Figure 5) A possible way down to New Bern was with the barges carrying the equipment of the troops stationed near the city. Although it is impossible to know for sure how George made it to New Bern, it is clear that the seventeen-year-old did make it back to the 85th NYVI.

George joined the 85th NYVI at New Bern where they were once again waiting and drilling. The days followed a pattern of company drilling in the morning and battalion drilling in the afternoon. This would change in March due to Confederate

North Carolina

Figure 6.



Cities and Rivers of Importance
to George Steenrod and the 85th
New York Volunteer Infantry.

General Lee giving Confederate Lieutenant General James Longstreet command of the 43,000 troops in the Department of Virginia and North Carolina. Longstreet had several challenges ahead of him; protect Richmond, gather supplies for Lee's starving army and keep Union troops penned in at New Bern and Washington, North Carolina, along with those at Suffolk, Virginia.⁶

The attack on New Bern would come from Confederate Major General Daniel Harvey Hill's Division in North Carolina. Hill sent three columns into New Bern, one to cut the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad and communications south of the city, a second to advance from Kinston; and the last to take Fort Anderson, which lay across the Neuse River opposite New Bern. The 85th NYVI was ordered across the river to help in protecting the fort against the bombardment by the southern troops. The Confederate Army was forced to retreat, but not before filling wagons with hams, salted fish, flour, and cornmeal as they retreated.⁷

Hill, retreating from New Bern, set his sights on Washington, North Carolina. At the end of March, Hill begin his assault on Washington, but to no avail. Hill was forced to withdraw his troops when Washington was re-supplied on April 19, by a steamer from New Bern. However, the 85th NYVI and other regiments from New Bern made the trip to Washington to assist in the fight, only to find the Confederate earthworks deserted. After exploring Washington, the regiment made the return trip to New Bern on April 24. The regiment stayed only until May 2, when they boarded the steamers, the *Massasoit* and the *Emile* for a journey to Plymouth, North Carolina.⁸

Plymouth, North Carolina is located on the Roanoke River about seven miles from the mouth of Albemarle Sound. The Seventeenth North Carolina had burned the

city six months earlier during a cavalry raid. This small city of about 2,000 was about to become the home of the 85th NYVI and several other regiments for the rest of the year. The regiments began to build up earthworks around the city and set up permanent camp.⁹

The months of May and June were spent building up the earthworks and new forts along the perimeter of the city. (See Figure 7) There was some excitement in the camp when it was reported that Colonel Belknap and Surgeon Smith had resigned from the regiment. Belknap's resignation came as no surprise, since he was disliked and thought inept by the men of the regiment. Colonel Enrico Fardella, the Italian commander of the 101st New York regiment, would replace Belknap. Smith's resignation came as a surprise to some, as he was respected and seemed to be concerned about the health of the regiment. The longer the war continued, the smaller the 85th NYVI would become, due to illness, battle, and desertion.¹⁰

By June 1863, the war had yet to turn in favor of the Union Army. In late January the Army of the Potomac had changed hands again, this time General Joseph Hooker would take the reins. Hooker replaced Burnside, who suffered a terrible defeat at Fredericksburg in December and by January had lost Lincoln's faith. At Chancellorsville, however, Hooker would suffer a defeat even more brutal than Burnside's defeat at Fredericksburg. Hooker's Army of the Potomac would engage Lee and Jackson's Confederate forces on May 1, near Chancellorsville, Virginia. This battle would cost the Union over 17,000 men, the South suffered almost 13,000 losses, but the South's losses were made even worse when Lee's right arm was killed by friendly fire. General "Stonewall" Jackson was wounded on May 2, and finally lost his life on May 10,

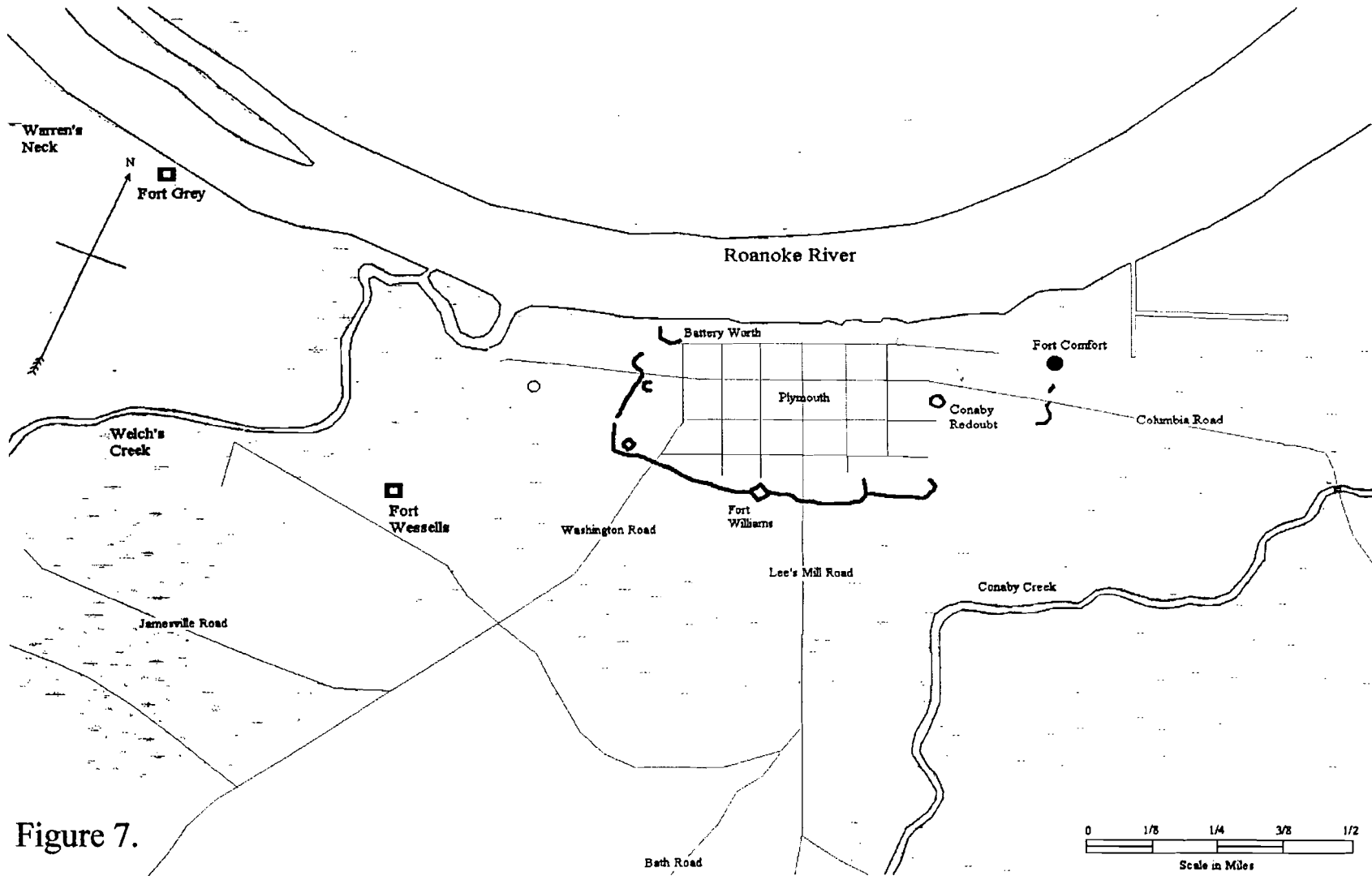


Figure 7.

Plymouth, North Carolina with Union defenses in Fall 1863 and Winter/Spring 1864.
 Home of the 85th NYVI throughout this time.

1863.¹¹ Lee's win at Chancellorsville would help him to push into Pennsylvania, where he would fight the biggest battle of his life.

While May and June did little to improve the Union Army's morale, the month of July would bring new hope for the weary soldiers. However, this hope came at a terrible price that the Union army was forced to pay in death. Union losses at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville had given Lee's Army of Virginia the opportunity to march into Pennsylvania. These Confederate victories had been major factors in the dismissal of two different Union Commanders of the Army of the Potomac. Joseph Hooker had replaced Ambrose Burnside after Fredericksburg and Major General George Meade replaced Joseph Hooker in late June. In early July, Union and Confederate forces gathered around the small town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The Civil War's largest and bloodiest battle would give the Union a much needed morale boost and compelled the Confederate Army to retreat back to Virginia. The battle came with a cost that was staggering for the 85,000 man Army of the Potomac, over 23,000 men were killed, wounded, or captured. Lee's 65,000 man Army of Northern Virginia, suffered total losses in excess of 20,000 men.¹² Gettysburg also cost Lee and the Confederacy the domination it had long held over the Army of the Potomac.

July 4, 1863 compared to July 4, 1862 was a much different day for the Union and its army. The Union was not only able to celebrate a great victory at Gettysburg, but was also able to celebrate the fall of Vicksburg under US Major General Ulysses Grant. Grant had laid siege to the Mississippi city on May 18, after having fought Confederate General John Pemberton's troops east of the city. Pemberton's 30,000 men and the citizens of Vicksburg were not going to give up their city without a fight. It would take

Grant's 75,000 man Army of the Tennessee, with Admiral David Porter's river gunboats 48 days to capture the city. The surrender of Vicksburg, starved into submission on July 4, gave the Union Army almost complete control of the Mississippi River. Just five days later, with the surrender of the Confederate garrison at Port Hudson, Louisiana, the Union army effectively split the Confederacy in two and took complete control of the Mississippi River.¹³

By late June, the 85th NYVI had been waiting at Plymouth for over two months and had seen very little action. The month of July would follow the same pattern, with small skirmishes near Williamston and Boone's Mill, but overall the men at Plymouth were maintaining and holding the city. The inactivity was increasingly frustrating, especially when news came about Hooker's defeat at Chancellorsville and the battle at Gettysburg. The days had once again taken on a pattern similar to the days spent in Washington D.C. in the winter of 1862. There was picket duty, daily drills in the afternoon, and Sunday inspections. The weather was also plaguing many of the 85th NYVI, since many were used to the cooler climate in New York. The men at Plymouth were fighting a type of warfare, but it was against the overwhelming mosquito population. There was also the constant problem of illness, many men were suffering from what was termed the "ague." This illness involved fever and chills, and gave many soldiers the shakes. These shakes would come and go, and could often be incapacitating one day and simply go away the following day. The official terminology for this illness is Malaria, a disease caused by a parasite, which is injected into the human blood stream by the bite of a mosquito. The disease occurred most frequently along the coastal areas of the South and malaria was one of the two major medical conditions that afflicted both

armies. The other medical condition was diarrhea, which increased in the spring and winter months.¹⁴

August was spent much the same as July, except on August 21, when the 85th NYVI, excluding companies E and K, moved to downtown Plymouth. This move allowed for the 85th NYVI to grow even more comfortable in their surroundings. While other Union regiments were fighting and starving in the field, the men of the 85th NYVI were eating mutton for dinner and having fresh milk and eggs for breakfast. The men were also issued rations of ham and potatoes at one point, and now had access to fresh fruit. However, illness continued to be a problem and the men were forced to fend for themselves because of the lack of medical supplies.¹⁵

September, October, and November were spent in Plymouth, with the men continuing to guard the city. The waiting war had most definitely set in for the 85th NYVI and the other regiments in Plymouth, North Carolina.¹⁶ The now eighteen-year-old George Washington Steenrod spent the year 1863 in better condition than the previous year. The young private had finally turned the legal age to enter the service on July 7, 1863, though he was already considered a veteran. By October, it had been almost two years since he had seen his parents and siblings. Although no letters can be found, George was likely receiving letters from his mother, sisters, and younger brother, Charles C. Steenrod, who was only three years his junior. George's older sister, Sophia, no longer lived in her parents household by 1860, but wrote George in 1864 and is likely to have written him letters in 1863. George's younger sister, Lida, was only six when George left to fight in the war and by 1863 had spent a fourth of her young life away from her older brother. It was certainly clear that Lydia Steenrod was deeply concerned

and worried about her son and wanted him to come home. George's three-year enlistment would be up in January of 1864, and, in November, the question of whether he and other members of the 85th NYVI would re-enlist was already a topic of concern.

The month of November brought another aspect of the war into Plymouth, North Carolina, the political side of the war. Elections were held for governor of New York, and the men of the 85th NYVI held a mock election. The men in Plymouth speculated about Lincoln, and the war going on in other places. There were reports of men starving up in Richmond's Libby Prison, and a prisoner exchange helped to prove that the Confederate Army was taking terrible care of the men they imprisoned.¹⁷

December was more of the same, with the waiting and wondering. The end of the year came quietly to the men of the 85th NYVI in Plymouth, but 1863 closed in a better fashion than 1862. In 1863, the Union had finally gained some ground, as the Confederacy began a slow and agonizing slide into deprivation and starvation. For the Union there was hope that 1864 could bring an end to the long and painful war, and the men at Plymouth believed they could play a part in that conclusion. However, the men at Plymouth, the 85th NYVI, and George Washington Steenrod had no idea what awaited them during the year of 1864. The past Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year had been the last that many of the men in Plymouth would ever know. The days of good rations, clean clothes, and freedom were numbered.

Chapter 4 ❖ “Everything is Lovely and the Goose Hangs High”

The end of 1863 saw George Steenrod and the 85th NYVI waiting and guarding the city of Plymouth on the Roanoke River. The end of the year 1863 differed greatly from the end of 1862. Although, 1863 had started off with a devastating defeat at Chancellorsville, the Union Army had made strides against Confederate forces at both Gettysburg and Vicksburg. These successes had come at a great cost for the Union, with 1863 producing some of the bloodiest fighting in the war. The Union suffered 23,000 casualties at Gettysburg, with Lee’s Confederate forces suffering 28,000 casualties. The siege of Vicksburg included 4,835 Union casualties, with Confederate General Pemberton suffering 32,697 casualties, including 29,495 men surrendering to General Grant and the Union.¹ Lincoln, angered at General Meade’s failure to pursue Lee’s troops following Gettysburg, was still looking for a General that could end the war.

The latter part of 1863 brought defeat for the Union at Chickamauga, Georgia but Union victories in Tennessee came under Union Major General Ulysses Grant at Chattanooga, Lookout Mountain, and Missionary Ridge. These victories helped to give the Union the push they needed to continue the fight against the Confederacy. They also turned Lincoln’s view to the man he needed to lead his troops, Major General Ulysses Grant. Lincoln would name Grant as the commander of the Union armies on March 10, 1864.

January 1, 1864 was an important day for many of the men at Plymouth, North Carolina. Many of the enlisted men in the regiment finished their three-year service on December 31, 1863. The men in the 85th NYVI had spent two and a half long years away from their homes in New York, and many of them had not seen spouses, children,

parents, or siblings since the Fall of 1861. The decision to re-enlist had to be taken seriously, because it had become apparent that the war could go on for a long time.

Even after barely surviving 1862 because of illness, George Steenrod made the decision to re-enlist in the 85th NYVI for another three years. George also made the decision to keep a diary at the beginning of 1864. The diary that he was able to purchase was a small, leather bound, daily pocket diary for the year 1864. The diary allowed for 3 entries on a page and included a calendar with phases of the moon; notable days and events, along with a sunrise and sunset schedule.² George wrote in the diary almost daily throughout the year. He wrote in pencil, and in red and blue ink, and most generally remarked on the highlights of his day and the weather conditions of the day. For example:

Friday, January 1, 1864

Clear and pleasant We had a very good time first a Big race and next a wheelbarrow race next climbing a greased pole the officers had a Ball at the Navy Hall

Saturday, January 2.

Clear and pleasant I reenlisted in the Veteran Corps for three years or sooner discharged Bully for Our Side I am a Veteran Hiram Grew, Silas G. Burdick, Edwin Voorhees Enlisted to day

On January 1, George became one of the many members of the 85th NYVI to re-enlist in the service for another three years. On that same day the men in Plymouth enjoyed a spring like day and were able to take part in activities such as George mentions. The men not only had wheelbarrow races, but also had contests concerning a greased pole and greased pig. This carnival type atmosphere seems out of place with the very serious matter of re-enlisting for another three years service. The activities on January 1 may have occurred for several reasons. The men were celebrating the start of a new year and the success of having lived through the previous year. The celebrations

also made happy and content men who were more likely to re-enlist in the army and encourage their fellow soldiers to re-enlist.

George's fellow company members, Hiram Grew, Silas Burdick, and Edwin Voorhies also made the decision to re-enlist. Hiram Grew and Silas G. Burdick were both privates in their early twenties from Little Genesee who had enlisted on September 2, 1861, a day when many of the Allegany County men enlisted.³ Edwin Voorhies, also a September 2, 1861 enlistee, followed his older brother, George, into the service. George Steenrod knew George and Edwin Voorhies from his days in Wirt, and both brothers were in their late twenties at the time of their re-enlistments. Edwin was wounded in action during the peninsula campaign at Fair Oaks, Virginia, but had recovered from his wounds and re-joined his brother and fellow company members at Plymouth.⁴

Sunday, January 3.

The weather is clear and pleasant we had Regimental Inspection and Dress Parade at five P.M. the Boys are recruiting pretty fast

Tuesday, January 5.

Clear and pleasant we had Monthly Inspection to day I went on Camp Guard at nine A.M. No news of importance

Wednesday, January 6.

Cold and stormy we had a Hail storm last night I was relieved from Camp Guard for Our Company is going to move to Fort Grey 2 and one half miles from Plymouth

At the regimental inspection it was announced that all of Companies D, G, and I had re-enlisted and more than two-thirds of Company B had re-enlisted. The re-enlistment campaign, which Major Walter Crandall and Lieutenant Butts were actively pushing, quickly became a success. It was their desire to have three-quarters of the 85th NYVI re-enlist for another three years. It would take them until January 10, before they were able to secure the re-enlistment of three-quarters of the 85th NYVI.⁵

In the beginning of January, the 85th NYVI began to break into companies and secure different locations around Plymouth. Company A replaced Company I in the defense of Roanoke Island, because of a lack of discipline among the men of Company I.⁶ This move to Roanoke Island, inadvertently, saved the lives of many of the men from Company A. George and Company C were told on January 6, that they would be leaving Plymouth for Fort Gray, but it would be several days before the men actually moved to their new location.

Thursday, January 7.

Clear and pleasant the ground is covered with Ice & snow It begins to look like winter
Our Company did not move to Day

Saturday, January 9.

Cloudy and Rainy and quite cold weather No move to Day

Sunday, January 10.

Clear and Pleasant Our Co and Co H of our Regiment moved up to Fort Grey and relieved three companies of the Ninety Sixth N Y V Very muddy

The turning of the weather from spring like to winter depressed many of the men who had re-enlisted just a few days earlier. The general unhappiness of his troops led the new regimental commander, Colonel Fardella, to leave for Fortress Monroe in an effort to convince Department of the South officers to allow re-enlistment furloughs for the men of the 85th NYVI.⁷ Fardella would have little luck in securing these furloughs for his men.

Monday, January 11.

Clear and pleasant Chancy and I fixed our shanty or rather Chancy did for I laid and shook received a letter from home

Wednesday, January 13.

Cloudy and some rain I received a letter from Sophia I have not answered it yet

The Chancy that George is sharing a shanty with is his second cousin Chauncey Stebbins. There were several members of the 85th NYVI who were related to each other

in some fashion. There were at least two sets of brothers in the regiment, the Voorhies and Irish Brothers. George may have been related to other members of the regiment, but it is impossible to know who and just how many. George also mentions that he laid and shook on the 11th, this is due to the malaria that was affecting him and many other soldiers.

One of the most important factors in helping to keep the spirits of the soldiers high was mail. George and his parents, as well as his siblings, were all educated and literate individuals. Therefore, it is not surprising that George received letters from his parents and his siblings. On January 13, the letter George received was from his 22 year-old sister, Sophia.

Thursday, January 14.

Still raining I am on picket on the Bank of the River it is very unpleasant standing picket
No news

Saturday, January 16.

Clear and pleasant there was five Deserters came in this morning they all enlisted in the
Second N.C. Vols

Sunday, January 17.

Clear and pleasant we had Sunday morning Inspection at Nine A.M. by Captain Brown
of Co. H

The days once again settled into a pattern of guard duty, drilling and Sunday inspections. The two companies at Fort Gray continued to help build up fortifications around the fort. When the Confederate deserters came into Fort Gray on the 16th, it caused a round of rumors to spread. Their enlistment in the loyal Union troops of the 2nd North Carolina Infantry would have made for some discussions on the Confederacy and the men that served in the Confederate Army. The loyal 2nd North Carolina troops had joined the 85th NYVI during the reorganization of the Subdistrict of the Albemarle, Department of Virginia and North Carolina. In early January this reorganization had

brought together in Plymouth, still under command of General Wessells, the following troops: 85th NYVI; 8th, 15th, and 6th Connecticut Regiments; 2nd North Carolina; 101st and 103rd Pennsylvania Infantries; 24th New York Independent Battery, and the 12th New York Cavalry.⁸

Thursday, January 21.

Clear and Pleasant went on Pickett at nine A.M. It was a very pleasant night Nothing of importance transpired to Day

Friday, January 22.

Clear and pleasant I was relieved from Picket at nine A.M. Co. B of our regiment had one man kill by the Guerillas on the Chowan River

Saturday, January 23.

Clear and pleasant I was on Fatigue Duty drawing timber to Stockade the Fort no news

While George and Company C, along with Company H, spent January at Fort Gray, the other companies remained at Plymouth. On January 21, some of the troops at Plymouth marched to Harrellsville, North Carolina to destroy a Confederate commissary. The orders were to destroy 150,000 to 200,000 pounds of pork, 270 bushels of salt, 10,000 pounds of tobacco and 32 barrels of beef. While much of the food was destroyed, it is not surprising that some of the food ended up in the knapsacks of the Plymouth men.⁹ While on this expedition, a member of the 85th NYVI Company B, was killed by a guerilla bullet. The death of Private Alvah Phillips put Company B's mustering officer, Captain Chauncey Aldrich, in the awkward position of mustering in a dead man. Throughout the days in January, the re-enlisted veterans had slowly been mustered into their respective regiments. Private Phillips had yet to be mustered and in order for his mother to receive his bounty he needed to be mustered into the regiment. While Aldrich balked at mustering in the dead man, General Wessells had no problem with mustering in a dead man.¹⁰ Wessells order for the muster came as no shock to the 85th NYVI, as they had long admired and respected their Brigade commander.

Monday, January 25.

Clear and pleasant I Drilled on the Fort not on the Fort but on the guns in the Fort very hard work

Tuesday, January 26.

Clear and pleasant I Drilled on the Fort I acted as gunner for the thirty two pounder

Thursday, January 28.

Clear and pleasant we have been practicing target firing with the guns on the fort we fired nine shots but did not hit the mark

For the veteran eighteen-year-old farm boy, George Steenrod, the days of late January were filled with more excitement than the previous six months. He was helping to fortify Fort Gray, and while not exactly able to “hit the mark,” he was able to fire the large weapons in the fort. On January 29, George found time to write his older sister a letter in response to her letter earlier in the month.

George was more than likely unaware at this time that his younger brother, sixteen-year-old Charles Steenrod, had enlisted in Company F of the First New York Dragoons. Charles Steenrod, like his older brother, enlisted by lying to recruiters about his true age. It is impossible to know if Washington and Lydia Steenrod agreed with his decision to enlist or if they attempted to stop his enlistment. In either case, Charles was successful in his enlistment and on January 20, 1864 he mustered in as a private in the Union Army.¹¹

Sunday, January 31.

Cloudy and looks like Rain we had Sunday morning Inspection at Nine A.M. Went up the River on the Gunboat Bombshell the Gun Boat Underwriter was Blowed up

Tuesday, February 2.

Clear and pleasant I went to town on a Pass and came back on the Dolly The Massasoit came in to Day and Reports fighting at Newbern

Thursday, February 4.

Clear and cold Very High winds It is reported that the Rebs are Fighting at Newbern N.C.

On January 29, the 101st and 103rd Pennsylvania regiments took part in helping to break up a company of Georgia Cavalry on the outskirts of Windsor, northwest of Plymouth, on the Cashie River. The gunboat, Bombshell, was used to shell the woods surrounding the city, preventing the Confederate Cavalry from sneaking back into the town.¹² On the following day, George was able to take a ride on the gunboat Bombshell, and on February 2, he rode on the gunboat Dolly.

The men at Plymouth were unaware that activities were taking place within the Confederate Army that would indirectly affect them. In early January, Confederate General Lee had made the decision to retake New Bern, North Carolina and capture Union gunboats patrolling the Neuse River in North Carolina. Brigadier General Robert Hoke, a North Carolina native, had been suggested for command, but by virtue of his seniority, Major General George Pickett took command of the operation. At the end of January, Pickett had gathered 13,000 troops and fourteen navy cutters near Kinston, North Carolina.¹³

On February 1, Pickett was ready to attempt the taking of New Bern from the Union Army. Pickett's surprise attack on the city was almost finished before it started. Fog and a burned out bridge delayed his troops over a creek, allowing for a telegram to be sent from a Union outpost to New Bern's Union brigade commander, General Innis Palmer. Pickett was able to get past military outposts and was within a mile of the city before the guns of Fort Totten, near New Bern stopped him. By February 3, Pickett was forced to call a retreat when the additional troops he needed were unable to get past heavy Union artillery fire. The Confederates were repelled, but caused Union losses of 100 killed and wounded, with 13 officers and 284 enlisted men captured. Union losses

also included the hanging deaths of twenty-one loyal North Carolina soldiers by angry Confederate troops.¹⁴

Friday, February 5.

Cool and cloudy and very high winds We had monthly Inspection to Day by Captain Coats No news from Newbern yet the Fifteenth Connecticut went to Newbern

Saturday, February 6.

Cloudy and unpleasant no news from Newbern as yet It is very lonesome here at present we are ready for the Rebs or the Rebs Ram

Sunday, February 7.

Cloudy and high winds Very unpleasant weather We had Company Inspection Everything is right at Newbern the Rebs are whipped

The men at Plymouth were aware that if New Bern fell to the Confederate troops, Washington and Plymouth, North Carolina would be the next targets of the Confederate Army. Because of this, George and many of the other men wanted to know any information about the happenings at New Bern. George made a diary entry about the Fifteenth Connecticut being sent to New Bern, but it was the Sixteenth that was actually sent from Plymouth to help in the defense of New Bern.¹⁵ George's diary entries make it clear he is ready to fight and that the city and forts near Plymouth are ready for a possible Confederate attack. George's mention of the Rebs Ram is in reference to the rumor about the possible construction of a Confederate ironclad. The Confederacy was in fact designing such a ram for help in the re-taking of several southern coastal cities.

General Wessells, who was concerned about a possible attack on Plymouth after the New Bern attack, had the fortifications around the city checked. On the north side was the Roanoke River, and earthworks that the troops had built in the previous fall and winter surrounded the other three sides of the city. Surrounding the perimeter of the city were several forts that would help to defend the city. Fort Gray, two miles up the Roanoke River, had been supplied with four guns, which ranged from three ten-foot long

24-pounders to a twelve-foot long 100 pounder. Fort Gray was manned by 85th NYVI Company H, and parts of Company C and G, and fifty men from Company H, Second Massachusetts Heavy Artillery. Fort Worth (Battery Worth), on the bank and further down river, had a two-hundred pound rifled gun. Fort Williams, on the southern side of the city, sat in the middle of the earthworks that surrounded the city. Fort Williams had four heavy guns, and was the headquarters for General Wessells and his staff. There were also two other forts near Plymouth, Fort Comfort (also known as Compher) was to the east of the city and Fort Wessells was to the southwest of the city. (See Figure 7 on page 52) Plymouth also had natural defenses, including a canal and swamp three miles to the south and southeast and ten miles to the southwest was another swamp.¹⁶

February was relatively quiet, with George and his company continuing to guard Fort Gray. George's life had settled into a pattern of picket, guard duty, and regular Sunday morning inspections. His diary entries remark on things such as the state of the Confederate Army, the activities in camp, his health, and, of course, the weather. The weather seems to be topic of much interest to the eighteen-year-old farmer's son. George may be focused on the weather for several reasons. The weather was constant, it was something that George could always write about in the diary. The weather was also extremely important to George and the other soldiers because most of their work and activities took place outdoors.

Tuesday, February 9.

Clear and pleasant We received Richmond Papers of the 5th to Day their army is very hard up for Food and Clothing

Friday, February 12.

Clear and very pleasant I am on picket in the middle Post I wrote a letter to A.C. Everything is lovely and the goose hangs high

Tuesday, February 16.

Still raining and very unpleasant I am on guard at the Fort. I sent my certificate of Reenlistment to W.H. King the supervisor of Friendship

Saturday, February 20.

Clear and very cold there was a very heavy Frost this morning Captain Brown went out with about twenty men to scout around the country we went about four miles

Monday, February 22.

Clear and pleasant I was on picket in the Forenoon had a shake in the afternoon and was relieved

Tuesday, February 23.

Clear and pleasant I had another shake this afternoon forty men from our Co and Co H went on an Expedition commanded by Capt. Brown

Wednesday, February 24.

Clear and pleasant we returned from the Expedition at five A.M. we surprized six rebs at a party and captured them I am very tired and Foot sore

Friday, February 26.

Clear and pleasant Very high winds John Stanley got his furlough for thirty days We expect to go home in a few days

George and the rest of the re-enlisted 85th NYVI had been waiting to receive their re-enlistment furloughs since the beginning of January. George's friend, John C. Stanley, was able to receive his furlough. The twenty-one-year old Stanley, who had enlisted in Scio Township, may have received his furlough due to his rank in Company C. Stanley, who had enlisted as a Private in October of 1861, had been promoted to Corporal in January of 1863.¹⁷ George was obviously led to believe that his own furlough and the rest of the 85th NYVI veteran's thirty-day furloughs would be shortly forthcoming. It is not surprising that George would be anxious about receiving his furlough, as it had been over two years since he had returned to Friendship to see his family. George, and most of the 85th NYVI, did not receive their much-anticipated furloughs. George's diary entries for the rest of February and all of March continue to reflect the monotony of camp life, but along with that monotony came the ever pressing fear of an attack on the city.

Tuesday, March 1.

Clear and pleasant We moved into Different Quarters to Day I went to town the Gun Boat Bombshell is cut off up the Chowan River

Wednesday, March 2.

Clear and pleasant It rained some last night I am on picket the Gun Boats were firing up the Chowan River they relieved the Bombshell

Friday, March 4.

Clear and pleasant I finished moving to Day Captain Brown doubled the guard to night they expect an attack here

Monday, March 7.

Clear and pleasant I was on picket to Day and had another shake Capt Coats inspected us to Day

Tuesday, March 8

Cloudy and high winds I went up to the fishery with Lieut Frost in a Sail Boat we got some fish

Friday, March 11.

Cloudy and rainy I am on picket on the left post it was very pleasant towards night Captain Brown came around about midnight

Sunday, March 13.

Clear and pleasant Very high winds we had Inspection and then went into the Fort Gen'l Peck issued an Order to the Veterans

George, while giving no indication of how he views his commanding officers abilities, does take the time to mention a few of them. At different times he mentions several officers, and the first of these is Major Walter Crandall. George was familiar with Crandall, because he had been Company C's First Lieutenant at the organization of the regiment. Crandall had served as Company C's Captain from December of 1862 to May of 1863, before a promotion to Major, during which he served the entire regiment.¹⁸ George also mentions Captain Samuel Adams, who was promoted to captain in Company C after Crandall's promotion to major. Adams served as Captain of Company C until the end of the war.¹⁹ George more than likely knew Adams before the war, since both came from Friendship, New York. George was also familiar with several of the other Regimental Captains, including; Company D's William Starkweather, Company G's

Hiram Coates, and Company H's John Brown. Company inspections were done by any of the company captains, and George mentions Adams, Coates, and Brown in this function. George also mentions a Lieutenant Frost, who went with George to a fishery near Plymouth. Frost, a native of Wellsville Township in Allegany was the First Lieutenant of Company H, whose majority of men were from Wellsville.²⁰ George's mention of division commander General John Peck is one of the few times that he writes an entry concerning a high-ranking commander. It is unclear what the order is that Peck issued to the veterans on March 13, 1864.

Wednesday, March 16.

Cloudy this morning It snowed about two inches last night I was relieved at nine A.M. it is very cold and high winds

Thursday, March 17.

Clear and pleasant When this carnal war is over no Irish need reply for Everything is lovely and the goose hangs high

Monday, March 21.

Cloudy and cold It commenced snowing in the afternoon and snowed all night I was on picket on the left post

Thursday, March 24.

Clear and pleasant I was on picket on the River post. I went up to the fishery and got some fish

Saturday, March 26.

Warm and wind went on picket at Nine A.M. I am on the left post with G.W. Lane and Daniel Hall of Co H Countersign Antietam

George's entry on St. Patrick's Day expresses a dislike for the Irish, and he again uses the phrase "Everything is lovely and the goose hangs high." George used this phrase several times in other entries in the diary. It is apparently an expression that George uses to show that for the moment everything is right in his life.

George's entry for March 26, has several interesting aspects that George had not written about before. George mentions a G.W. Lane, whom he had previously mentioned

on March 6. Girdin W. Lane was not an original member of the 85th NYVI. Instead, the 33 year-old Lane mustered into Company C in early October of 1862.²¹ The relationship between the two men appears to have its up and downs, and George mentions the older man at different points in the following months. The other man mentioned, Daniel Hall, was close to George in age and enlisted only a month prior to George in Company H, and like George held veteran status due to his re-enlistment in January of 1864.²²

George's entry on March 26 includes the countersign, or watchword, which according to army regulations is "given to such persons as are entitled to pass during the night, and to officers, non-commissioned officers, and sentinels of the guard."²³ This was the first time that George wrote down the countersign in his diary, although he had performed picket duty for the last two and a half months. George would make four other countersign entries before the end of April.

Monday, March 28.

Clear and pleasant I was on picket on the left post had another shake to Day John Stanley came up here to Day

Wednesday, March 30.

Clear and pleasant the paymaster has come to pay us I went to town in the Forenoon It rained towards night

Friday, April 1.

Very Stormy Weather On picket guard the River Rose so high that the water covered the Floor of the Shanty it commenced falling about three A.M. Countersign Bunker Hill

Saturday, April 2.

Cold and stormy weather came off guard at nine A.M. went to town in the afternoon the Regiment drew some new guns they are Springfield Guns Colts Patent a nice gun

Sunday, April 3.

Warm and pleasant in the Forenoon stormy in the afternoon had Sunday morning Inspection at nine A.M. the paymaster said that he would pay us tomorrow

Monday, April 4.

Rainy disagreeable weather received our Old Bounty Seventy Five of our New Bounty and three months pay went to town and paid my debts On picket in evening

The end of March brought the paymaster to Plymouth for the first time in several months. However, after paying the enlisted men between \$200 to \$300 each, the paymaster had no money to pay the officers. To fix the problem, the veterans who were due furloughs, agreed to receive enough money to meet their needs until they received their furloughs. The balance of their re-enlistment bounties would be paid at Elmira, New York while they were on furlough.²⁴ This way, the officers could also receive their pay. The 85th NYVI also drew new muskets at this time, Colt Springfield's, which George and many others believed to be nice guns.

Tuesday, April 5.

Cold Rainy Day went to town in the Forenoon Came off picket at Half past Eight A.M. the water was a foot deep in the picket shanty this morning Gurdeen and Chancy are both shaking

Friday, April 8.

Clear and pleasant Nothing going on in forenoon Company drill in the afternoon heard to night that troops were on the way here to relieve us so that we can go home

Saturday, April 9.

Clear and pleasant in the Day Rainy in the Evening went on Picket at Eight A.M. I was on the middle post with Geo. And Edwin Voorhees Countersign Trenton

Sunday, April 10.

Clear and pleasant in the Forenoon rainy in the afternoon and Evening came off picket at Nine A.M. Gurd Lane is an ass Austerlitz

George and many other soldiers were constantly affected by the malady they knew only as the "ague," which was actually malaria. George's mention of Gird Lane and Chauncey Stebbins shaking are an indication that the malaria also affected them. George makes several diary entries that show he was unable to perform certain activities due to his own shaking. In the Civil War a large portion of the malaria problem came from the construction of earthworks and fortifications. While the military devoted energy to the proper construction of the fortifications, they spent little time on drainage control for these fortifications. This led to a large amount of standing water, which was the

perfect breeding ground for the mosquitoes that transferred the disease among humans. The illness was treated with quinine, which because of the bitter taste, was often dissolved in whiskey. Surgeon General William Hammond was so concerned about the affects of malaria that he attempted to make sure that all troops stationed in malarious regions of the country were given the drug daily.²⁵

The rain was doing little to help keep the spirits of the men up, and although George does not mention it, on March 9 came news that sunk the men's spirits even lower. It was announced that because of "the continued threat of the enemy" the veteran furloughs were not going to be issued.²⁶ The men were angered not only because they would not get their furloughs, but they had also lost the chance to get their full pay in Elmira. Even though George would not be visiting his family, he still remained with several of the men that he had known since he was a small child. The Voorhies brothers, who George had grown up with in Wirt, and his cousin Chauncey all seem to be part of his everyday life, along with Gird Lane, who apparently had done something to offend George on April 10. The writing of the word "Austerlitz" is the countersign that George needed to know for the picket duty he had done the night before.

Monday, April 11.

Clear and very warm and pleasant One Escaped Union Prisoner and one Reb Deserter and one Reb Captain got disgusted with the Confederacy and came into Our Lines to Day

Tuesday, April 12.

Very fine Day until most Night when it commenced raining there was some more deserters and Contrabands came in to Day sick in the Evening

Wednesday, April 13.

Clear and very pleasant went on guard at Eight A.M. there was a deserter from the Rebs came in to Day with his wife they are going to Illinois Lister

Friday, April 15.

Cloudy and pleasant Drill in the afternoon Fifty Recruits came for our Regiment to night Mail Boat Massasoit came in and brought some mail None for me

George's entries for April 11, 12, and 13 indicate a large massing of Confederate troops near Plymouth which was supported by the increase in Confederate deserters entering the city. The increase in activity only heightened the tension that had been building since the attack on New Bern in February. General Wessells had been concerned about Plymouth and unsure of his ability to protect it since the fighting at New Bern. Wessells was constantly in fear that Confederate troops were ready to move against Plymouth at any moment. On February 7 and 10, Wessells had requested an additional 3,000 men to help in the defense of Plymouth.²⁷ Wessells would not get the additional men, thanks in part to General Butler at Fortress Monroe in Virginia. Butler wrote General Peck in New Bern, "Plymouth is as safe as Fortress Monroe provided you keep from being surprised."²⁸ Peck replied to Wessells that "Without a naval force they might as well attack Fort Monroe. Demonstrations may be made, but no serious operations."²⁹ Peck and Butler were confident that an attack would not occur at Plymouth due to its naval strength. A fleet of gunboats under the command of Lt. Commander Charles Flusser was protecting Plymouth. Not only was the Bombshell, the boat George had taken a ride on in place, but near Plymouth were also the gunboats the Miami and the Southfield, and smaller propeller boats Ceres, and Whitehead.³⁰

Now in April, Wessells was again concerned that Plymouth and Washington could become the next targets of Confederate troops. While the attack on New Bern helped to confirm that there was a large build up of Confederate troops on the Neuse River, Wessells also had reports of Confederate movement towards the Roanoke and Tar Rivers. Wessells was also aware that the naval force at Plymouth would more than likely face the newly completed Confederate ram Albemarle if an attack occurred. The fear that a Confederate ram would be used in an attack on Plymouth caused concern not only for

Wessells but for his men as well. When the Albemarle had been moved down the Roanoke River to Hamilton in late March, George had noted in his March 25 diary entry that it was rumored that the ram was coming to Plymouth. (See Figure 8)

The movement of the Albemarle, and the increase in Confederate deserters, refugees, and contraband (fugitive slaves) coming into the Plymouth fortifications heightened Wessells' concern about an attack on Plymouth. Again, Wessells requested that Peck send reinforcements to Plymouth, and once again Peck denied this request.

General Peck sent this reply to Wessells:

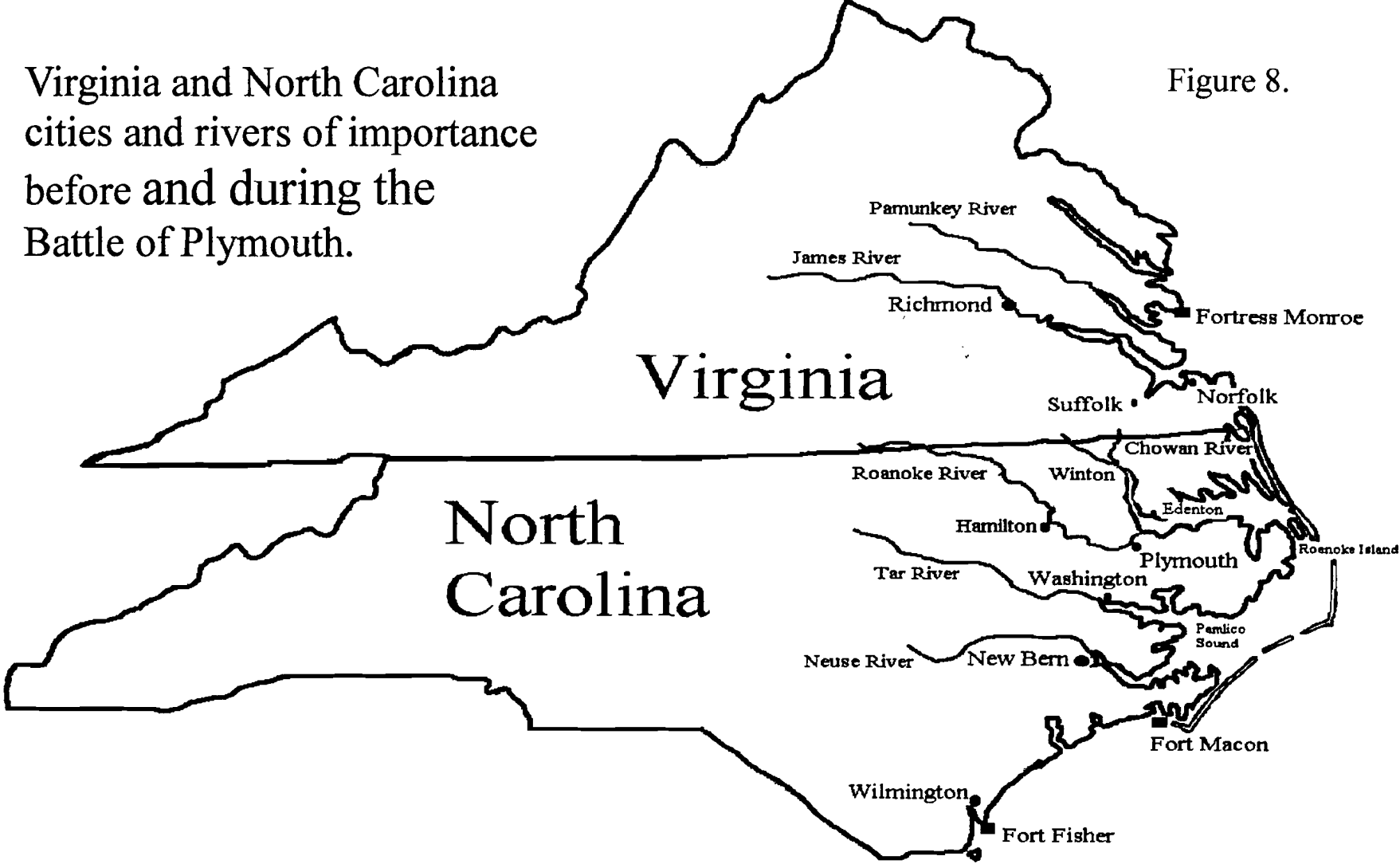
This is the time for rebel demonstrations in North Carolina, just in advance of the opening campaign in Virginia. Have they as many troops in North Carolina as in April of 1863, when Longstreet made feints in order to deceive me and take my forces at Suffolk? Would not heavy detachments now endanger the operation of Lee? Under all the circumstances I think their demonstration will be light.³¹

Wessells, accepting Peck's reply, allowed the gunboat Tacony, newly arrived in Plymouth, to return to New Bern on the morning of April 17.³² On the previous day, Wessells, believing a report that Confederate forces were threatening Washington on the Tar River, continued to maintain his defense of the Plymouth Garrison. Naval Commander Flusser, simply being cautious, positioned gunboats on the Roanoke downriver from Plymouth. Flusser also lashed together the Southfield and the Miami with their bows pointing in to form a "V." Flusser hoped to entrap the Albemarle in the "V," and sink her with artillery fire from Fort Gray and Fort Worth.³³

April 16 ended without incident in Plymouth and the 16th Connecticut held a band concert that night. The men at Plymouth were seemingly unaware that their time at Plymouth would be coming to an end. George's diary entry for the day shows how quiet the day was and that he went into town to get mail and wrote a letter to his younger

Figure 8.

Virginia and North Carolina cities and rivers of importance before and during the Battle of Plymouth.



brother Charles. It is impossible to know if George was sending the letter to his parent's home in Friendship or if he is sending it to where Charles is stationed. George's next diary entry would be vastly different and the following week would bring many new experiences for George, the 85th NYVI, and the men of Plymouth.

Chapter 5 ❖ Private Steenrod's Pilgrimage to Hell

Sunday, April 17.

Cloudy but pleasant went on picket at Nine A.M. got shut in by the Rebs at Three P.M. we were attacked by artillery and Infantry in the Fort all night no one hurt yet

Sunday, April 17 started out like any of the other days that George and the 85th NYVI had spent at Plymouth. There was preparation for the monthly inspection by Colonel Fardella, and along with this inspection was to be a dress parade. Because of the preparation for the dress parade, the men at Plymouth were all in their best uniforms with the regulation hats that many of the soldiers despised. The day was to be just another Sunday at Plymouth. However, the day turned out to be nothing like previous days spent at Plymouth.

In the days before the 17th, General Wessells was concerned about reports that Confederate forces were building up near Edenton, north of Plymouth on the Albermarle Sound. Wessells mistakenly assumed that the buildup was for an attack on Washington, not on Plymouth. However, Confederate Brigadier General Robert Hoke had laid out a strategy not to attack Washington, but Plymouth. Hoke's three veteran brigades, commanded by Brigadier General Matt Ransom and Colonels John Mercer and William Terry, would greatly outnumber the garrison at Plymouth. While Wessells commanded about 3,000 men at Plymouth, Hoke was in command of over 10,000 Confederate troops. General Hoke was not only relying on his greater numbers, but the assistance of the ram Albemarle to retake the Plymouth Garrison.¹

At around 4:00 p.m. Hoke's three brigades began their attack against Plymouth from the southwest. A mounted patrol on Washington Road, which led into Plymouth, was captured as Confederate forces began to gather along the road. At this time Fort Gray was also attacked with heavy cannonade, forcing the fort to return fire. At the time

of the attack, George and 85th NYVI Company C, commanded by Captain Brown, and a detachment of the Second Massachusetts Heavy Artillery, commanded by Captain Fiske, were stationed at the fort.² Plymouth's line of defense extended from Fort Gray to the crossing of Conaby Creek, which was 2 1/2 miles below the town. Fort Gray was separated from the garrison at Plymouth by Welch's Creek and its marsh. The garrison at Plymouth was distributed along the line of defense in the following manner:

Sixteenth Connecticut Volunteers, Colonel Francis Beach, 400 effective men; Eighty-Fifth New York Volunteers, Colonel E. Fardella, 450; One hundred and first Pennsylvania Volunteers, Lieutenant Colonel T.F. Lehman, 400; Twenty-fourth New York Independent Battery, six guns, Captain Cady; detachment from Companies A and F, Twelfth New York Cavalry, Captain Roche, and two companies Second Massachusetts Heavy Artillery, under Captain Sampson, the latter being distributed in small detachments in the several earth-works. There were also present portions of two companies Second North Carolina Volunteers, native troops, under Captains Johnson and Haggard. The naval force at that time consisted of the gun-boats Miami, Lieutenant Commander Charles W. Flusser, U.S. Navy, one of Kentucky's most noble and chivalrous sons; Southfield, Lieutenant French, volunteer Service, with the smaller boats, Whitehead and Ceres; the whole under the division of Captain Flusser.³

The evening of April 17 saw Fort Gray fired on by Confederate Colonel Terry's First Brigade of Virginians and a Confederate artillery battery until nightfall. Ransom's Brigade and the 8th North Carolina moved into the woods and took up position near Fort Williams.⁴ Throughout the evening Confederate forces continued to mass about a mile from Plymouth on Washington Road and small skirmishes occurred near these massing troops. At the Plymouth wharf the steamer Massasoit was rapidly loaded with officer's wives, children, blacks and noncombatants and it sailed to Roanoke Island. Roanoke Island's protection was the responsibility of Lieutenant Colonel Will Clark and Company A of the 85th NYVI. As night fell in Plymouth, the Albemarle, which had been delayed, was reported to be near Williamston. The Ceres had been fired upon and crippled and

had returned to just above Plymouth on the Roanoke River.⁵ Wessells' fear of an attack by Confederate troops was now happening, and he could only hope that his troops and the naval force on the Roanoke River could hold off the Confederate forces until Plymouth was reinforced. George, inside Fort Gray and now under fire from the enemy, still found time each day to make an entry into his diary.

Monday, April 18.

Clear and pleasant morning this morning we found a line of skirmishers advancing on the Fort we drove them back we had two men killed and 3 wounded

The night of April 17-18 was short for all combatants and both sides were ordered to sleep with their arms. Many of the sailors spent the night preparing for the Albemarle, which was now an all-too-real threat for the Navy. Confederate Colonel Terry's Brigade, under the cover of darkness, marched to within 800-1000 yards of Fort Gray. At daybreak, the siege against the fort was started anew. This is what George is referring to when he mentions the skirmishers. Terry ordered Companies C and G of the 11th Virginia to advance on the fort, which prompted Union firing that caused the Confederate troops to quickly retreat. During the continued assault on the fort, the armed transport, Bombshell, attempted to communicate with the fort but was struck below the waterline. The gunboat made it back to the wharf at Plymouth before sinking. The disabled Ceres was able to rejoin the naval squadron after coming down the river from above Fort Gray.⁶

General Hoke split his attack into two sections. The first section had Ransom attacking from the Union left approaching Fort Comfort along Columbia Road. The second section had Hoke's main force attacking Fort Wessells from the Southwest. Hoke's plan was to attempt to eliminate the various fortifications around the city of Plymouth during his attack. The attack on Fort Wessells started at about 10:00 A.M. and was met with heavy resistance. Ransom's troops attacked towards Fort Comfort and Fort

Williams throughout the day. The Union troops at Plymouth were able to hold the Confederate troops at bay until evening. Fort Wessells had been taking heavy artillery fire throughout the day, and at about 9:30 P.M the fort's small arsenal building was hit, exploding and sending deadly missiles all over. Union gunboats, trying to stop the advancing Confederate troops, attempted to shell Hoke's forces, but most of the shells landed behind the troops. The Union gunboats caused further damage by accidentally striking the magazine in Fort Wessells. Confederate troops, recognizing the chaos in the Union defense ceased fire and called for the surrender of the fort. A mortally wounded Captain Chapin and his officers surrendered Fort Wessells at about 11:00 p.m. on April 18. The attack killed a Union captain, a sergeant and three enlisted men, and had also taken the life of Confederate Colonel John Mercer. After the surrender of Fort Wessells, Hoke requested that General Wessells surrender the town. General Wessells declined this request.⁷

The fall of Fort Wessells, while not a good sign, did little to distract the remaining garrison from their own battles. Hoke's Confederate forces continued to push toward the defenses of Plymouth. (See Figure 9) The surrender of Fort Wessells encouraged General Hoke, but he was concerned that Plymouth would be almost impossible to take without help from the Albemarle. Hoke and his troops were relying on the shelling that the ram could give the Union defense, enabling Hoke and his Confederate forces to force Wessells and his Union forces to surrender the city. On the night of April 18, at around 10:00 p.m. the ram Albemarle drooped anchor about three miles upriver from Plymouth. Albemarle's Commander James Cooke was encouraged by a report from Gilbert Elliot, the ram's designer, stating that the ram could make it safely through the Roanoke River

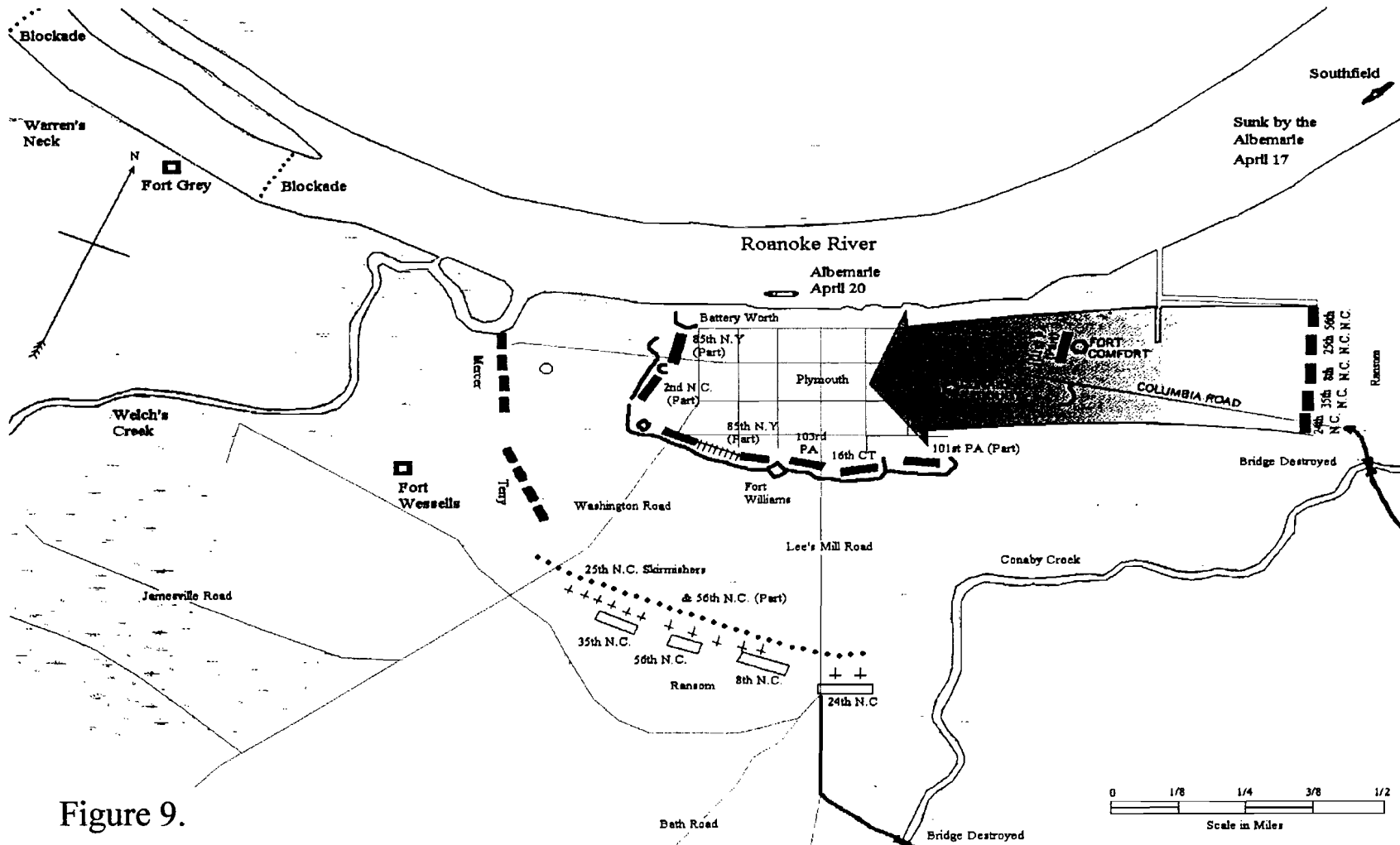


Figure 9.

Battle of Plymouth - April 17-20, 1864

channel. Cooke, knowing Hoke needed his help in taking the garrison, set sail at 2:35 a.m. on April 19 for Plymouth.⁸

Tuesday, April 19.

This morning the Conf battle off Rebel Ram came and sunk one of our gunboats and scared the others away We are still Fighting one hurt to Day

The Albemarle passed Warren's Neck before coming upon Fort Gray in the cover of darkness. The fort's firing had little to no effect and the ram continued to make its way down river to Plymouth and the Miami and Southfield, now joined together to form a "V." Flusser had briefly separated the two gunboats the previous day to allow the Southfield to attempt to help in the defense of Fort Wessells and to allow the Miami to help in the defense of Fort Williams. When the Albemarle reached the gunboats, now reunited, Commander Cooke used the Albemarle to ram the starboard bow of the Southfield. The Southfield began sinking as water poured into the hole in her prow, while her crewmembers threw grenades at the now retreating Albemarle. Commander Flusser on the Miami, now in trouble because it was still lashed to the Southfield, ordered a nine-inch rifled gun to fire on the Albemarle. The shell, exploding on the Albemarle's armor, sent a fragment back to the Miami, killing Flusser. The Miami, now under command of Captain French, removed its lashings from the sinking Southfield, reversed its engines, and fled downriver.⁹ The city of Plymouth was now under Confederate fire from all four sides and the choices for the men in the garrison had dwindled to two, fight and die or surrender.

Wessells' report from August 1864 explained the effect of the Albemarle's success on his men: "He [the enemy] was now on every side of the town, and this unlooked-for disaster created among the troops a moral effect of the most discouraging character. Hitherto every hardship and exposure had been met with cheerfulness and

confidence.”¹⁰ Confederate troops continued to push forward on all sides of Plymouth with help from the Albemarle. Ransom’s men were continuing to push to the east side of the city, which had been left virtually unprotected because of the belief that the swamp and gunboats would stop any progressing troops. While the march was not easy because of the swamp, the Confederate troops had nothing to fear from the now absent gunboats and made a relatively easy advance toward the east side of the city. Late on the night of the 19th, Confederate troops crossed Conaby Creek and waited for daybreak to begin their attack on Fort Comfort. Hoke’s troops on the other side of the garrison pushed forward and continued the bombardment of Fort Gray, Fort Williams, and Battery Worth. The entire garrison also came under attack from guns on the Albemarle and from another Rebel steamer, the Cotton Plant.¹¹

Wednesday, April 20.

Clear and pleasant Plymouth was surrendered at Ten A.M. Fort Grey at 12 A.M. no one hurt to day we were marched around to Plymouth and put with the other prisoners

On the morning of April 20, Fort Gray continued to hold under heavy artillery fire, but Confederate forces were able to overtake Union forces between Fort Gray and Battery Worth. Hoke’s troops were able to capture Battery Worth, while Ransom’s troops forced Union troops back into Fort Williams.¹² The men in the city of Plymouth could do little but return the fire of the ground troops, and watch for incoming shells from the Albemarle. General Hoke, noting his advantage, asked for and received an interview with General Wessells at about 9:00 a.m. on the 20th. Hoke demanded a surrender of Wessells “in consideration of my untenable position, of the impossibility of relief, and that the defense had been highly honorable to all concerned. In failure of this, indiscriminate slaughter was intimated.”¹³ Wessells refused to surrender Plymouth and Hoke set about changing his mind. Hoke, now in control of Plymouth from all sides,

made an attack on Fort Williams, Wessells' headquarters. Hoke's attack came from all four sides, and destroyed any hope of Fort Williams standing. Wessells, now with the full backing of his officers, hoisted a white flag only an hour after Hoke's request for surrender. It was 10:00 a.m. on April 20, 1864.¹⁴

It would take until 2:00 P.M for all of the troops around Plymouth to surrender. Union troops headed towards Fort Williams continued to fight until reaching the fort, unaware that the fort was under Confederate control. The 24th New York Independent Battery retreated from Fort Williams, but was forced to surrender to Confederate troops. Fort Gray, cut off from all communication from Plymouth, was unaware of the surrender and continued fighting. While George's diary entry states a time of 12:00 a.m. for the surrender of the fort, official reports claim Colonel Fardella did not give up the fort until 2:00 p.m. on April 20.¹⁵

Union Generals Peck and Butler were surprised to learn of Wessells' surrender, since both had believed that Plymouth could sustain an attack. However, fearing that Plymouth could fall, Colonel Warford in New Bern had been ordered to take 800 men in two regiments to Plymouth. This order came on the morning of April 20, too late to make any kind of difference to the already surrendered garrison.¹⁶ On April 21, General Peck in New Bern was forced to issue General War Orders No. 66 at his headquarters in New Bern:

With feelings of the deepest sorrow the commanding general announces the fall of Plymouth, N.C., and the capture of the gallant commander, Brigadier General H.W. Wessells, and his command. The result, however, did not obtain until the most gallant and determined resistance had been made, Five time the enemy stormed the lines of the general, and as many times were they handsomely repulsed with great slaughter, and but for the powerful assistance of the rebel iron-clad ram and the floating iron sharpshooter battery, the Cotton Plant, Plymouth would still have been in our hands.¹⁷

Wessells, in his August 1864 report, estimated his loss of life in battle to have been about 150, while his enemy had a loss of life near 850. The 85th NYVI had a loss of 7 men killed in battle and six others with fatal wounds. The 85th NYVI, excluding Company A, who were still on Roanoke Island, were all listed as Captured in Action on April 20, 1864. Wessells' August figures do not allow for the 2,850 men that were now prisoners of the Confederate States of America. The loss of Plymouth also caused the evacuation of Union troops at Washington due to a fear that Hoke would attack. Hoke, after leaving Plymouth, was headed to both Washington and New Bern when he was ordered by Confederate General P.G.T. Beauregard into Virginia to help the Confederates at Petersburg

The surrender of Plymouth brought silence to the small town on the Roanoke River and a difficult and startling realization to the Union men. They were now Confederate prisoners of war, and were no longer under the control of the Union Army. They were instead subject to the whims of Confederate officers. With the surrender of Fort Gray, George and the men from the fort were moved closer to Plymouth and kept with the rest of the Union soldiers. The eighteen-year old who had survived almost three years of war, several battles, and a long illness was now facing imprisonment somewhere in the Confederacy. It is impossible to determine just how much George and the other men knew about the growing prisoner of war problem that both the Union and the Confederacy were facing in 1864. The end of paroles and exchanges was forcing the two armies to keep large numbers of men imprisoned throughout the country. The problem of keeping prisoners of war was growing out of lack of space, manpower, and food. The Union, while struggling, was not as desperate as the Confederacy when it came to prison

camps. The Confederacy, which was already stretched with supplying its own troops, was having severe problems supplying prisons and staffing them. The Confederate Army was being forced to rely on young boys and old men. For the enlisted men at Plymouth, the Confederacy's prison problems would become all too clear in the coming weeks.

On the night of April 20, the captive Union men were marched about a mile from Plymouth and forced to sleep on the cold ground without blankets. The city of Plymouth was plundered of its goods and the Confederate soldiers harassed many of the Union soldiers, although George Steenrod reported fair treatment up to April 25. The Confederates were flush with the victory of capturing a Southern city that had been held by Union forces for almost two years.

Thursday, April 21.

Clear and pleasant started from Plymouth at 11 A.M. marched to 4 miles above Jameston and staid all night cannot find fault with the treatment we received

Friday, April 22.

Clear and very warm marched to within 5 miles of Hamilton and encamped got quite tired but was treated well

Saturday, April 23.

Clear and very warm started at sunrise and came to Hamilton and encamped and staid all day, had some of the best water that I have had in a great while

Sunday, April 24.

Clear and pleasant in the Forenoon rainy in the evening started from Hamilton at Eleven A.M. and came twelve miles and encamped guarded in the Horcourt Legion

Monday, April 25.

Clear and pleasant Came to Tarboro and encamped Drawed our Days ration used ugly as the very old herry O I would like to kill them

While all the enlisted men and their officers began a long march, General Wessells and his personal staff were separated from the troops. Wessells and his staff, including Colonels Beach (16th CT), Lehman (103rd PA), Fardella (85th NYVI), and several surgeons, remained in Plymouth until April 23. At that time they were transferred

to Richmond, via Weldon and Petersburg, and confined in Libby Prison. Wessells and 850 other captive officers were removed to Macon, Georgia in early May and remained at the prison there until June 10. Wessells and his staff were removed from Macon and transferred to Charleston, South Carolina, where they remained until an exchange occurred on August 3, and by August 9, Wessells and his staff were in New York.¹⁸ Wessells troops, however, would have a much different fate.

When George and his fellow soldiers left Plymouth on April 21, they were forced to march on bad roads and wade through several knee-deep creeks. (See Figure 10) The first days march took them fifteen miles away from Plymouth, under guard of the 35th North Carolina. On April 23, the men who were in good spirits and had been singing Union songs to offset Confederate songs, reached Hamilton, North Carolina. The good spirits did not last long, and the men were reminded of how brutal war could be when members of the loyal 2nd North Carolina troops were hung by angry Confederates. The forced march continued from Hamilton to Tarboro and the Holcombe Legion began guarding the prisoners.¹⁹

On April 25, the men received rations of a little bacon and either a pint of corn meal or beans from their Confederate guards. In a unique entry, the normally laconic George vehemently expresses his displeasure at the Confederates. This displeasure may stem not from the guards, but from the Tarboro civilians who came to gawk and harass the Union prisoners.²⁰ George was not alone in his thoughts about the Confederates in Tarboro. Charlie Mosher of Company B expressed similar sentiments of displeasure in his diary entry.²¹ The prisoners left Tarboro on April 25 and headed to Rocky Mount.

Tuesday, April 26,

Clear and pleasant Our regiment and the Officers took the cars for Wilmington about twelve

Route of George Steenrod and
the 85th New York Volunteer
Infantry from Plymouth, NC to
Andersonville, GA.

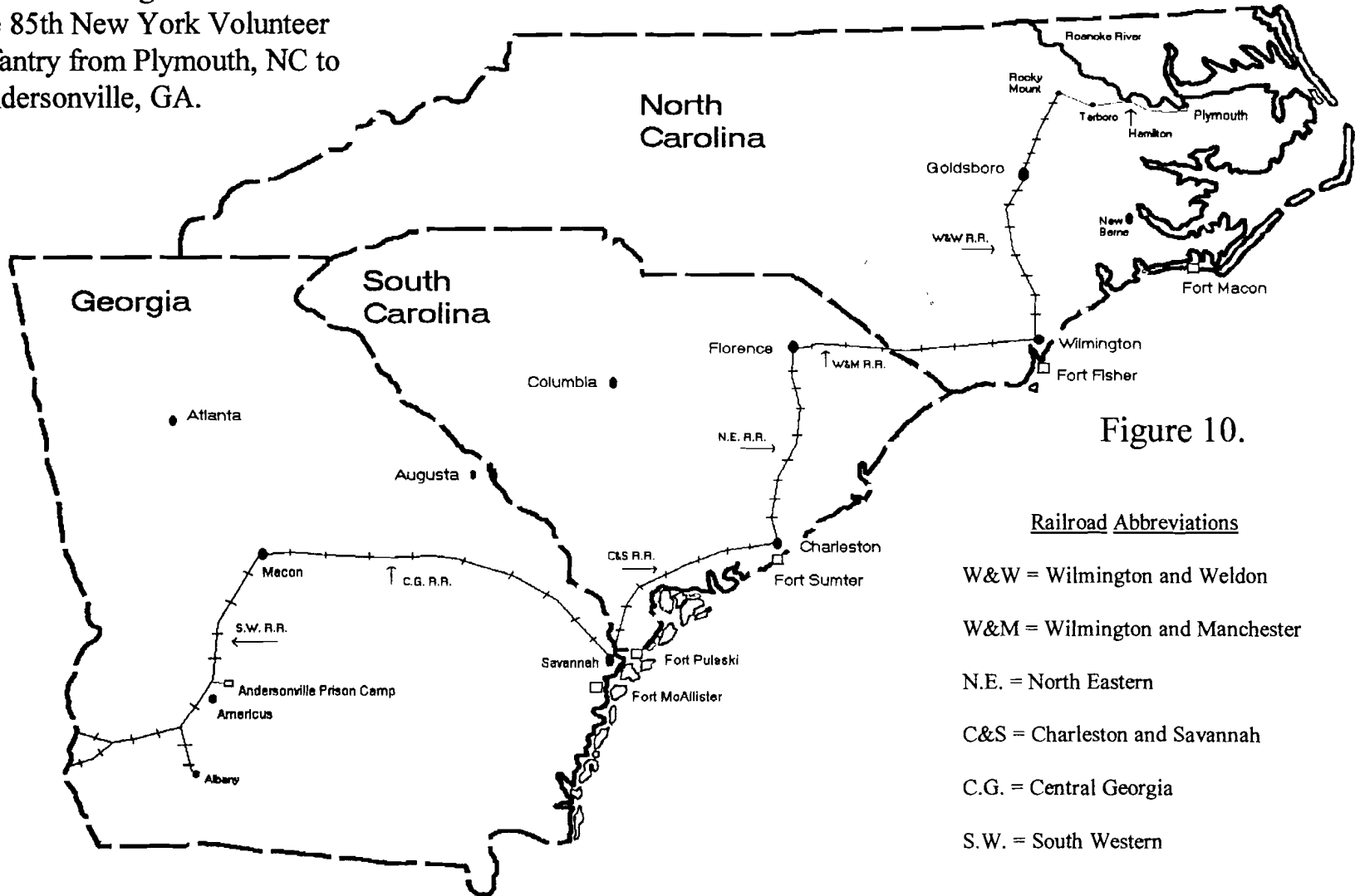


Figure 10.

Railroad Abbreviations

W&W = Wilmington and Weldon

W&M = Wilmington and Manchester

N.E. = North Eastern

C&S = Charleston and Savannah

C.G. = Central Georgia

S.W. = South Western

Wednesday, April 27.

Clear and pleasant this morning found us in Wilmington we changed cars and started for Florence where we arrived a 11 in the night

Thursday, April 28.

Clear and pleasant started from Florence at nine A.M. arrived at Charleston at Ten P.M. and changed cars and guard guarded by the Seventeenth S.C.

Friday, April 29.

Clear and pleasant started from Charleston about daylight and arrived at Savannah at half past two P.M. guarded by the Eighteenth S.C. started from Savannah at six this evening run all night

The trip continued on to Rocky Mount, North Carolina where there was a depot station in the city for the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad line. The men marched to the depot where their names, company, and regiment were written down, before boarding the boxcars for the next part of their trip South. Unfortunately, travel on the railroad helped considerably to speed up the amount of time it took to reach the final destination of the prisoners. Sometime during the day of April 26, the cars rolled through Goldsboro and across the now rebuilt Neuse River bridge, which the 85th NYVI had helped to destroy the previous year.²²

Although they were unaware of it, the 2,800 captured Plymouth soldiers had acquired a unique nickname that would stay with them for life. On April 26 the new nickname, the Plymouth Pilgrims, appeared in print for the first time. The Charleston (SC) Mercury ran an article that read:

THE PLYMOUTH PILGRIMS – We learn that the 2500 Yankee prisoners, captured by General Hoke's forces at Plymouth, left Wilmington last night, and may be expected to pass through Charleston this evening, on their way to the Prison Depot at Americus, GA.²³

According to the Plymouth Pilgrims Society, there is only one known explanation for the nickname given to the captured prisoners of Plymouth. This explanation comes from a story passed down through the family of David Mullin, Captain of Company G, 101st

Figure 11. Plymouth Pilgrim



Pennsylvania. The story is that “the soldiers, after the surrender, were marched single file to stack their rifles and due to their slow and somber walk, a Confederate commented that the prisoners looked like ‘a bunch of Pilgrims on their way to church’ and that their ‘offering’ was their rifles.”²⁴ The nickname was more than likely derived from the hats that the men at Plymouth were wearing on the day the battle started. The regulation hats that the

men had drawn in June of 1863 were black felt with stiff rims and had one side cocked up with a brass spread eagle to keep it in place. General Wessells insisted that the men at Plymouth wear the hats during dress parade, and this is why so many of the men had them on when the garrison was captured.²⁵

The Plymouth Pilgrims continued their forced march throughout the night and arrived at Wilmington early on the morning of April 27. Switching cars in Wilmington came as a relief to many of the soldiers, since they were packed into the cars tightly and were able to do little moving around. While in Wilmington the men took ferryboats across the Cape Fear River to make the switch to the Wilmington and Manchester Railroad line. The transfer gave the men an opportunity to eat and stretch their legs. The trip continued from Wilmington to Florence, South Carolina where they again switched cars for a different railroad line. At Florence, the railroad line switch allowed for a change of the Confederate guard from the 35th North Carolina to the 19th Georgia. The railroad line that carried the men from Florence to Charleston was the North Eastern Railroad line.²⁶

The arrival of the boxcars in Charleston brought some hope to the tired and hungry troops. This hope came from the occasional flash of guns from the troops of Union Major General Quincy Gilmore at Morris Island off the coast of South Carolina.²⁷ The hope was to be in vain as nothing came of this fire and the men were forced to once again change railroad cars in the city. The Confederate guard again changed; this time the 18th South Carolina assumed guard duty of the men from Plymouth and they headed towards Savannah on the Charleston and Savannah Railroad line.²⁸

Saturday, April 30.

Quite pleasant but rained some in the night arrived at Macon at Eight this morning guarded by the First Georgia got to the prisoners camp at Four P.M.

The Plymouth Pilgrims were again forced to switch railroad lines and guards in Savannah, Georgia. The new boxcars were on the Central Georgia line and the new guards were the 1st Georgia. In early afternoon the cars passed through Macon, Georgia and another line switch was made, this time to the South Western railroad line.²⁹ The journey from Savannah had taken the cars both North and West, but at Macon the cars were now rolling South. The final leg of the trip had begun and for many of the Plymouth men it was to be the last bit of freedom that many would ever experience. George and his fellow soldiers were now rolling towards Andersonville Prison Camp.

Chapter 6 ❖ Surviving Confederate Hospitality

The exhausted and hungry Plymouth Pilgrims arrived at Anderson Station, Georgia on the afternoon of April 30. The small hamlet had a population of less than twenty people and consisted of a depot, church, store, cotton warehouse, and a dozen or so shanties.¹ The railroad cars rolled into the depot at the small hamlet, where the men were unloaded and marched to a field. At this field the men had their name, rank, company and regiment noted by the Confederate officials and since Andersonville Prison camp was only for enlisted men, the company officers, who had made the trip with their men, were reloaded and sent back to Macon. These officers remained in Macon at a prison near the city, Camp Oglethorpe. Captain Henry Wirz, commandant of the prison, greeted the Plymouth Pilgrims.²

Wirz, a native of Switzerland, had immigrated to the United States in 1849. Wirz's life in Switzerland is something of a mystery, but after his immigration to the United States, he established a medical practice in Kentucky. Wirz enlisted in the Louisiana Volunteers Fourth Battalion at the start of the war and at the Battle of Seven Pines his right arm was crippled for life, paining him for the rest of his life. After his injury, Wirz was sent by the Confederate government to Europe to meet with Confederate Commissioners, James Mason in England and John Slidell in France. Wirz was sent because of his European birth. Wirz returned from Europe in January of 1864 and worked on the staff of General John Winder of the prison department in Richmond. In the spring of 1864, Winder ordered Wirz to take charge of the interior of Andersonville Prison.³ Wirz moved his wife, stepdaughters, and daughter to the small hamlet and took over the task of running the Confederacy's largest prison.

Revolver in hand, Wirz greeted the exhausted Plymouth Pilgrims in the field, and made it clear that he had a deep hatred for Yankees. Charles Mosher recorded the greeting in his own diary; “Stand up, you got tam Yankeys sons of Got tam b----, stand up, or I shoot you; you Got tam Yankeys, I vip you mit a broom stick.”⁴ The exhausted Plymouth Pilgrims, who had ignored the guards prodding them to stand, now stood. The standing prisoners were prodded by the guards into beginning the walk to their new home, the inside of the Andersonville Prison stockade.

The prison camp would be a sight unlike any other that George Steenrod had encountered. The first thing he and his fellow soldiers would notice, even before reaching the camp, were the sounds associated with the prison: dogs barking and men yelling. The dogs were bloodhounds, kept in pens. They were used in retrieving prisoners brave enough to try escape. George and the others would already have begun to notice the stench from the prison after leaving the train and standing in the field. The powerful stench came from the latrines and stream that the prisoners had contaminated with waste. Although the prison was only a few months old the stream had already developed a lining of thick green scum. Prisoner John McElroy (16th Illinois Calvary, Company L), had been at the prison for only three days in 1864 when he wrote this “All who drink freely are made sick, and their faces swell up so they cannot see.”⁵ The stench, so strong outside, would become even more unbearable in the stockade.

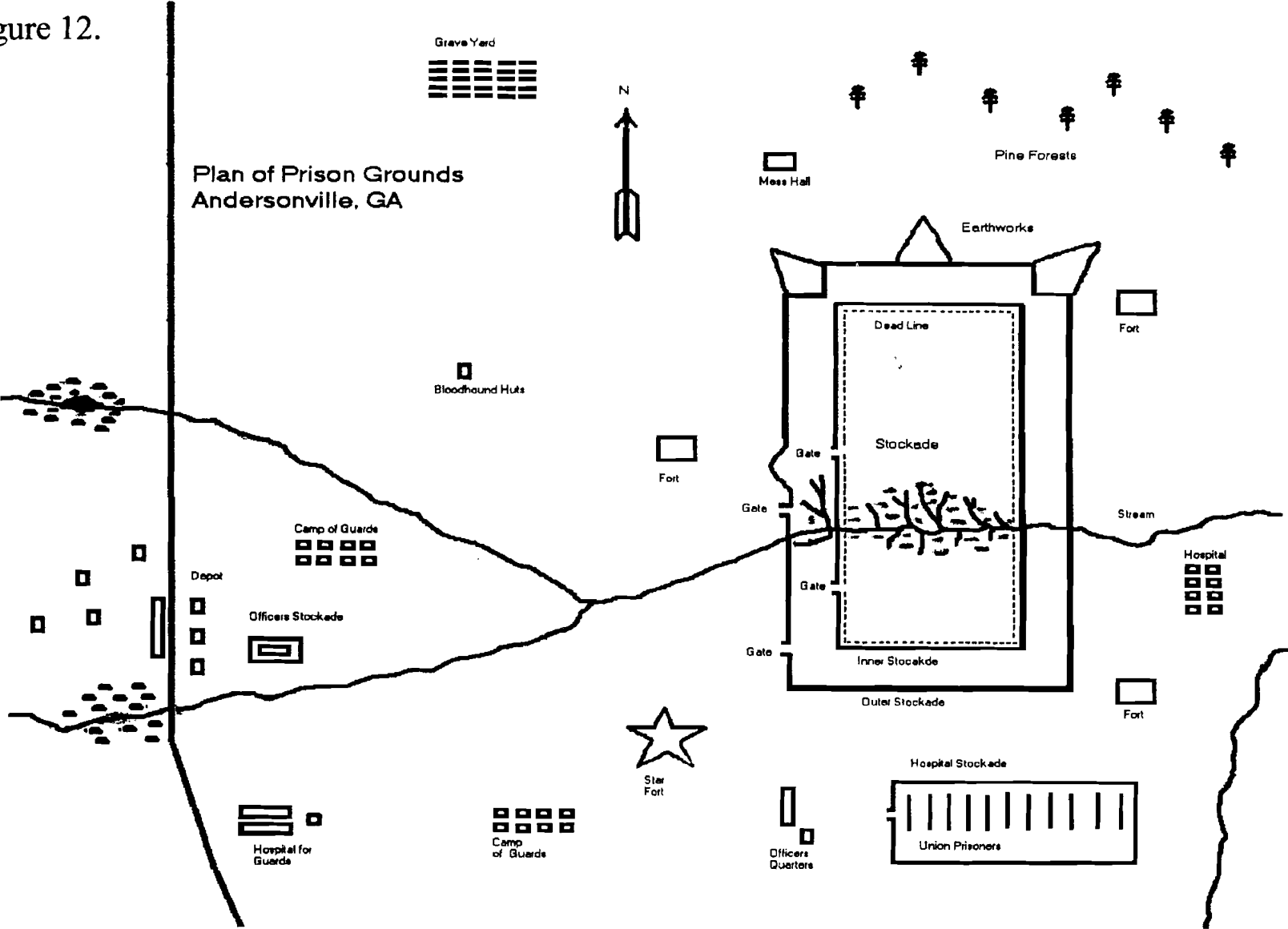
In late 1863, the Confederate Government had ordered the building of a simple double stockade in West Central Georgia on land near Anderson Station. This would be the cheapest and fastest way of solving the growing problem of war prisoners. In essence, the Confederate Government needed an enclosed space to put a large number of

men quickly. The space they found was a wooded area that had a wide stream, a branch of Sweet Water Creek, running through it. The idea was to enclose sixteen and a half acres inside a double stockade. The plan for the construction of the stockade was simple. Slaves were used to clear the area of trees and then, using the felled trees, they round hewed them, trimmed them off at twenty-foot lengths and dropped them end-down into five-foot trenches. The stockade walls are estimated to have been between fifteen to twenty feet high, with the logs pushed tightly together to allow no room in between.⁶ The stockade had two gates, North and South, with inner and outer doors. Archaeological work done at the prison in the 1990's shows that the gates were 27.6 feet by 34.8 feet with doors 9.5 feet wide. The 27.6 feet measurement refers to the width of the gate, while the 34.8 feet refers to how far the gate extended from the stockade wall. These are new measurements that differ from most historical accounts of 30 by 30 feet gates and doors 12 feet wide.⁷ (See Figure 12)

When George arrived at the prison, he and the other Plymouth Pilgrims were exhausted from the long march and the many hours spent on trains during the previous nine days. Before entering the stockade the men were divided first into detachments and then squads. The detachments, under the command of Confederate sergeants, numbered 270 men. These detachments were then broken into squads of 90 men, which were put under the charge of Union sergeants.⁸ After they were divided into squads, the Plymouth Pilgrims marched into the Andersonville prison stockade.

George Steenrod may have experienced any number of emotions when he saw the first set of gates swing open, fear and panic may have been prevalent in the mind of the eighteen-year-old. He was undoubtedly scared at what was behind that second set of

Figure 12.



doors. The 85th NYVI was part of the large grouping of men from Plymouth that entered the stockade that day. He could have been in the front, the middle or the back of the group. Chances are he was among many of his friends in the 85th NYVI and that may have been of some help. As the second set of gates swung open the entire group of men would have been hit with the overwhelming stench that emanated from the prison.

The stench of Andersonville Prison is something that cannot be imagined, unless one has been in a similar situation. At the time it was the smell of 9,000 men living in an area contaminated with their own urine and feces. It was also the smell of unwashed bodies, the fetid stream now a swamp, and the all-too-familiar smell of death. First the smell would hit, and then the sight of those unwashed bodies. At the time that George Steenrod and the Plymouth Pilgrims got to Andersonville, the camp was holding about 9,000 men in the stockade. There were about 600 in the hospital section of the stockade, with the number growing daily.⁹ The men inside the prison who greeted the George and Plymouth Pilgrims were dressed in an array of outfits. Some were in little more than rags; their clothing either having worn through or been stolen by others in the prison; newer arrivals were more likely to still have uniforms on. The condition of the men varied: some were struggling with illness, most were not getting enough to eat, and many were beginning to resemble skeletons. Charlie Mosher wrote in his diary that the prisoners “scarcely look like human beings at all; whose countenances show that there has been a desperate fight between hope and despair; and that despair has won the day....”¹⁰

The arrival of the Plymouth Pilgrims caused excitement in the prison, as was often the case when new prisoners arrived. The new arrivals would be one of the few

sources of new information for the prisoners. The new arrivals, or what was termed “fresh-fish”, would be more than a source of information. They were a source for newer clothes, possibly money, and all kinds of needed survival utensils. By the time George Steenrod and the Plymouth Pilgrims arrived at Andersonville, the infamous “Raiders” were very much in control. These Raiders were an assortment of prisoners who had formed a gang that beat up and terrorized the other prisoners.¹¹

The arrival of the Plymouth Pilgrims was different from the arrival of other prisoners. The Plymouth Pilgrims had one thing in their favor and that same thing against them: the new equipment they had been issued in late March, which they were wearing as they prepared for their monthly inspection when the Battle of Plymouth started.¹² This meant that when they arrived at Andersonville they were better dressed and better equipped than most prisoners already at the prison. John McElroy wrote about the Plymouth Pilgrims: “They were attired in stylish new uniforms, with fancy hats and shoes...and each had a large, well-filled knapsack, of the kind new recruits usually carried on coming first to the front...They were the snuggest, nattiest lot of soldiers we had ever seen.”¹³ McElroy quoted one of his companions as saying “Hulloa! I’m blanked if the Johnnies haven’t caught a regiment of Brigadier Generals, somewhere.”¹⁴ John Ransom, another prisoner, paid little mind to these new arrivals except to write, “Last evening 700 of the 85th New York arrived here.”¹⁵

The Plymouth Pilgrims, taking stock of their new environment, would notice several things about the prison. The gate they more than likely walked through was the North gate, since it was the gate most often used to bring prisoners into the prison. They were entering on a slope and to their left was the top of the hill and to their right was the

side of the hill that led to the fetid swamp. The grass had been trampled by the thousands of men already in the stockade and there were numerous campsites all over the prison grounds. The newest members of Andersonville were marched to the northwest corner and left to fend for themselves. Many of them went to sleep the first night with their blankets and coats protecting them from the night chill, but when they awoke the next morning they would find that those blankets and coats had been stolen.¹⁶ This was to be the first of many lessons that the “fresh fish” from Plymouth would learn in the following weeks.

Sunday, May 1.

Rained some in the afternoon J.C. Stanly G.W. Lane Thos Gagen Chancy and myself put up a shelter the twenty Fourth Independent Battery arrived to Day

Monday, May 2.

Clear and pleasant this morning we baked some Hoe cake which was quite good One man shot by the guard he was instantly killed nothing going on had a good mush

Wednesday, May 4.

Clear and pleasant G.W. Lane had the ague nothing going on Erastus Scott had Ten Dollars taken from him by the Sharpers*

On the first full day at the prison George wrote that he and several friends in his company put up a shelter. The first of these friends were John C. Stanley and Girdin Lane, both of whom George had previously mentioned. Thomas Gagen was a private in his late teens or early twenties from Scio, New York.¹⁷ The Chancy mentioned is Chauncey Stebbins, George’s thirty-year-old second cousin.

The shelter that George and his friends constructed was very primitive. When the land was cleared for the construction of the stockade, only two trees were left inside the stockade. The Confederate Government, pushed for time, saw no need to construct any type of barracks for the men. This left the prisoners with very few options for shelters.

* One that deals dishonestly with others.

The first prisoners were able to build small huts from scrap wood, but prisoners arriving later used tents or lean-to's or slept in the open. The prevalent form of shelter became the shebang. The shebang was constructed by digging into the ground several feet and then using wood at the edges to secure a blanket across the top.¹⁸ George and his friends were lucky enough to use a tent for their shelter.

George took particular interest in the new prisoners who arrived daily. This kind of commentary is common in most of the diaries that came out of the prisons, both North and South. Learning about the new units that came into the camp and hearing about where they had been and were coming from gave the prisoners something to do to distract from the boredom. It also gave them a sense of how the war was going.

One of the things that George and his friends discovered on their second full day at the prison were the rules concerning the dead line. It says a lot about what George had seen and done in the war, that he can so easily write, all in the same day, that a man was shot by the guards and instantly killed, but nothing was going on. George, along with many other soldiers, had become used to death. He had seen it come in many different forms, and had himself come close to death several times during the war. John Ransom's (9th Michigan Cavalry, Company A) diary interprets the event more directly, "crazy man was shot dead by the guard an hour ago. The guard dropped a piece of bread on the inside of the stockade, and the fellow went inside the dead line to get it and was killed."¹⁹ The dead line, located seventeen feet from the inner stockade, resembled a simple fence and surrounded the entire stockade.²⁰ Crossing over the fence made any prisoner fair game for the guards watching the prison from their posts at the sentry towers.

On May 4, George's friend Girdin Lane was experiencing a bout of malaria, which many of the soldiers referred to as ague. As already stated, the illness was very common throughout the war, not just in the prison. George continues to refer to it as both the ague and the shakes throughout his diary.

On May 4, George remarked that Erastus Scott, a twenty-year-old private from Company C, had money stolen from him by the Sharpers. Scott was from Boliver, a town near Friendship, and had been in the army a month longer than George.²¹ The stealing of Scott's ten dollars or any amount of money was not uncommon in the prison. The prisoners used money to buy from each other or the guards, or to obtain other services that were set up around the prison. The prison had become a fully functioning community by the time that George and the Plymouth Pilgrims arrived in April. This community was deeply affected by the arrival of the Plymouth Pilgrims in the early part of May. The condition of the Plymouth Pilgrims' clothes, due to the dress parade, and the fact that they had recently been paid, brought several new problems to the prison. The money and items the Plymouth Pilgrims introduced into Andersonville caused inflation, thievery, gambling, and all-around greed. It has been estimated that the Plymouth Pilgrims introduced around one hundred thousand dollars into the prison, the equivalent of one million dollars today.²²

Thursday, May 5.

Clear and pleasant quite a large number of prisoners made their escape last night by digging a tunnel under the stockade moved my tent

In May, tunneling became one of the last remaining ways to escape from the stockade. There had been other ways to try and escape earlier, such as being carried out with the dead. It did not take long before Wirz ended that means of escape. He required all dead bodies to be collected and taken to the gates, and they were to be left there until a

physician could verify they were in fact dead. Work detail outside the stockade offered another avenue of escape, but if the prisoner failed to get away from the work detail, the consequences could be deadly, starting with the dogs catching the prisoner and tearing into his skin. Many prisoners who tried to escape were brought back and put into the stocks and remained there for several days. Others, depending on Wirz's mood, were forced to wear a ball and chain around the stockade.²³

Saturday, May 7.

Clear and pleasant Fifty men died too Day heard that the sick were going to be exchanged Monday

Sunday, May 8.

Clear and very warm saw a paper that said there was fighting at all points

On May 7, George wrote that fifty men died, but official reports show that only 23 died on that day. The prison was growing quickly and by this time the stockade was holding 11,500 prisoners. The number in the stockade did not include the 600 sick that were in the hospital stockade.²⁴

May 7, was a day that changed George Steenrod's life, although at the time he was unaware that an event transpired that would affect him. George mentioned his younger brother Charles in previous diary entries, and had kept in contact with his brother by letter writing. At this time, George more than likely knew that his brother had enlisted in the army and was serving with the 1st New York Dragoons in Virginia. What George did not know was that while he was trying to survive the hell known as Andersonville, his younger brother was killed in battle. Charles C. Steenrod was killed while fighting under General Grant at Todd's Tavern during the Battle of the Wilderness.²⁵ It is not known how or when George found out about his younger brother's death.

The men at the prison often spoke about the exchange of prisoners between the two governments. The previous year, on May 25, the exchange cartel had collapsed. The main reason behind the collapse was the Confederate Government's refusal to exchange black Union soldiers. The Union still hoped to convince the Confederate Government to continue exchanges, but for the most part exchanges had stopped. George and his fellow soldiers could only hope and pray that the exchanges would not be abandoned.

Thursday, May 12.

Clear and pleasant 24 prisoners from Gen Thomas army arrived to Day

Friday, May 13.

Clear and pleasant Ten prisoners from Gen Thomas Army arrived to Day nothing going on of any Importance

Since there were few activities to do in the prison, it was exciting when the gates would swing open to allow new prisoners to enter. George took an interest in finding out about the new arrivals. The arrival of the new men was both a positive and a negative. The newly arrived prisoners brought news and information into the prison, but they were also increasing the number of men in the stockade.

The prison conditions begun to take their toll on George and the coming weeks would be tough on him. George never makes an entry describing his illness, and prisoner of war records do not indicate what he was suffering from. George had been sick many times throughout the course of the war, but in those cases he was able to recover in a stable and relatively sanitary environment. In Andersonville, these were not the conditions George would face going into the hospital.

May, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20.

Sick and not able to write.

Saturday, May 21.

Very warm Day went in the Hospital never saw lice so thick in my life.

Sunday, May 22.

Very Hot Day moved the Hospital outside the stockade had a mustard plaster on my side

May, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28.

Sick.

Sunday, May 29.

Clear and very warm discharged from Hospital.

Monday, May 30.

Clear and very warm returned to the stockade.

The hospital at Andersonville was originally located inside the stockade; it was not until late May and early June that the hospital was made into a hospital stockade outside the prison stockade. The “hospital” that George moved to was a much smaller stockade with hay on the ground for beds. Chief Surgeon Isaiah White laid the hospital out in wards, allowing him to assign surgeons to several wards. These wards, each with around ten to twelve men were covered by a square piece of canvas pitched like a tent. White had a well dug that was away from all latrines and waste disposal for the prison. He believed that clean water would help the prisoners recover quicker. White and his surgeons were not well equipped with supplies but used what they could to help the prisoners. The medicine practiced was at the very best primitive, with many men dying during surgery or from the results of the surgery. The hospital stockade was in little better shape than the prison stockade when it came to lice. The bugs were everywhere; and the surgeons touched prisoners at the hospital during surgery, but rarely other than that. They would stand away from the hay beds and ask the prisoners about their illness. It was left to the orderlies and other prisoners to carry out their orders.²⁶

Tuesday, May 31.

Clear and warm more prisoners arrived Nothing going on

At the end of May the number of men in the stockade had grown to 17,400 with an additional 1,000 in the hospital.²⁷ George was living among 18,000 other men in a space designed for no more than 10,000 men. The stream had become a death trap. The men who bathed or drank the water would often become sick. In order to get water to bathe or drink, many men would catch all the rainwater they could in their clothes and then wring that water out. Fleas, lice and any other bugs would have to be skimmed off the top.²⁸

Sunday, June 5.

Clear and pleasant in the Forenoon rain in the afternoon J.C. Stanley Died

John C. Stanley had been sharing a shelter with George. He had enlisted in the army just five days before George in 1861.²⁹ Stanley was the first of George's friends to die in the prison, and George noted that he died on June 5. Stanley's death provides an example of how the records for the prison differ from the actual prisoners' diaries. Prisoner Dorence Atwater was assigned, as a clerk, to keep a record of the burials at Andersonville Prison. He had been told that the list would be turned over to the Union Government at the end of the war. Atwater, fearing that the Confederacy would not turn over the list, made a second list in secret. Atwater survived Andersonville and smuggled the list out with him at the end of the war. Eventually the list would make its way to the Union Government.³⁰ The list includes: name, regiment and company served, death date, cause of death, and grave number. The Atwater list has J.C. Stanley dying of pneumonia on June 7.³¹ There could be any number of explanations about this discrepancy: the sheer number of men whose deaths had to be recorded is most likely the cause. J.C.'s death made him the fifth casualty that the 85th NYVI suffered at Andersonville. J.C. was one of the early deaths; and out of 12,192 graves, J.C.'s grave is number 1698.³²

Monday, June 6.

Clear and pleasant in the Forenoon rainy in the afternoon Some Yanks arrived from Grants Army

The Yanks that George referred to were the 1,040 soldiers who came into the camp on June 7. These men from Grant's army were captured at some point during Grant's Overland Campaign in Virginia. This campaign included the battles of North Anna and Cold Harbor. In the coming months, Andersonville would become home to many Yanks from Grant's Army.

Wednesday, June 8.

Clear and very warm drew cooked rations again Geo. Phelps came into tent

Thursday, June 9.

Clear and very warm Our detachment dug us a well Silas Burdick gave me some gum boots

Saturday, June 11.

Cloudy and warm had some Beans for dinner rainy in the evening

The rations that George and the others would sometimes receive were scarce and poor. The longer the men remained and the larger the number of men inside the stockade, the smaller the rations became. The rations included such things as: rice, beans, vinegar, molasses, bread, salt, cornbread, and some meat. The most common ration was cornbread, but this bread was made with the corncob, which caused severe problems for many of the prisoner's digestive tracts. The cornbread was almost impossible for some of the prisoners to eat, due to its coarseness and the poor conditions of the prisoners mouths.³³ This was caused by the onset of scurvy, which was caused by the lack of Vitamin C. Scurvy was a common cause of death at Andersonville because of the few rations of fresh fruits and vegetables. What little meat ration the prisoners received would eventually be eliminated completely. Rations in the prison could be cut in half for any number of reasons. The Confederate Government was struggling to support

the South and its army; and the prisoners at Andersonville were not its first concern. The rations were also being used up quickly by the growing number of prisoners.

George and his friends brought a new soldier into their tent on June 8. George Phelps of Company C was in his early twenties and from Friendship, NY. He had mustered in as a private and enlisted a month before George.³⁴

The military life style did not break down within the prison. George and his company remained near each other, and they still followed the chain of command. It cannot be said that this was true in every unit inside Andersonville. The Raiders are a prime example of the way some of the men inside the prison ignored the rules they had been trained in.

The prison had now reached 20,000 men and the human excrement in the swamp was causing the men to search for other avenues of retrieving water.³⁵ George and his detachment were forced to dig wells to find water that could possibly be drunk. The stream was now being filled daily with thousands of gallons of urine and feces. It had become a swamp that attracted flies and was filled with maggots.

Tuesday, June 14.

Cold rainy disagreeable Day reduced to half rations also the guards

Wednesday, June 15.

Cloudy and quite unpleasant in the Forenoon more pleasant in the Afternoon 1,000 prisoners arrived from Gen Grants Army Among them was John Young of the 1st NY Dragoons heard Major Scott was killed

Thursday, June 16.

Cloudy but warm 1,100 prisoners arrived from Grant's Army report contradicted about Major Scotts being killed very glad to hear it Bought some rice drew rice instead bread

Friday, June 17

Rainy and very unpleasant heard that George B. Tanner Died last night took John Young into our tent because he had no place to stay only in the rain

The weather in Georgia did little to help the prisoners survive. They had little protection from the rain and cold; the rain would seep into every piece of clothing and into their primitive shelters. It also made the stockade extremely muddy, making an already tough existence even tougher. By June 16 the stockade was holding 22,775 prisoners and the stockade population was continuing to grow at an alarming rate.³⁶ On June 15, George wrote about 1,000 men from Grant's army and on June 16 he writes of another 1,100 coming into the stockade. Official reports of the prison show that George was approximately right about these numbers. On the 15th 1,111 men came into the prison and on the 16th 1,124 new prisoners arrived. June 15 and 16 saw some of the largest numbers of new prisoners enter the prison in its entire existence.³⁷

George's concern for Major Rufus Scott was more than just friendly interest. Major Scott and George were both descendants of two of the Scott brothers who came to Allegany County, New York during its early settlement. While theirs was not a close relationship, they were third cousins, and the two had grown up in the same county and shared a set of ancestors. On June 17, George B. Tanner, Company C, became one of fifty men to die in a single day. Private Tanner, of Wirt, New York had enlisted two months prior to George. His official cause of death is diarrhea, a term often-used as cause of death: and he is buried in grave number 2120.³⁸ Sergeant John Young of the 1st New York Dragoons was captured at Todd Tavern, Virginia on May 4.³⁹ John Young was fighting in the same regiment as George's younger brother, but was captured before Charles Steenrod was killed. It is unclear how well George knew John Young, but it does appear that he knew Young before he came to the prison. George and his friends were kind enough to invite Young into their tent when they were already crowded.

Saturday, June 18.

Still rainy and very unpleasant more prisoners arrived from Bowling Green reports say to Day that seven transports had started from Savannah with prisoners

Sunday, June 19.

Still rainy and very unpleasant about 500 prisoners arrived from the Army of the Mississippi there was none that I knew Bread and meat

Monday, June 20.

Quite warm and pleasant until about 2 P.M when it commenced raining and rained very hard until night kept quite dry in our tent Bread and meat

Tuesday, June 21.

Quite warm and pleasant 200 prisoners arrived to Day from Gen Curtis command rumored that Gen Stoneman is advancing on this place with his Cavalry Mush and meat

The 18th through the 21st brought 1,600 more prisoners to the stockade, raising the number of prisoners to above 24,000. The average number of men dying each day had now reached fifty.⁴⁰ The men were receiving bread, but according to prisoner diarist John Ransom, "Our stomachs have been so abused by the stuff called bread and soups, they are diseased. The bread is coarse and musty. I believe that half in camp would die now if given rich food to eat."⁴¹

The rumor that George had picked up about General George Stoneman would become more than a rumor. General Sherman and General Stoneman wanted to try and find a way to liberate the prisoners at Andersonville and at Camp Oglethorpe in Macon, Georgia. Their poorly planned rescue attempt was a failure almost from the start. During the summer of 1864, Stoneman and his cavalry ran into Confederate General Joe Wheeler's Cavalry around Macon. Wheeler and his men knew the terrain and area much better and were able to force Stoneman into surrender before he even reached Macon. In an ironic twist of fate, Stoneman would end up a prisoner of war and his men would end up as prisoners at Andersonville.⁴²

Wednesday, June 22.

Clear and pleasant for the first time in twenty days Tommy Gagen is very sick with fever and pain in the side Chancy had the Ague man shot last night by the guard

Thursday, June 23.

Clear and pleasant Tommy Gagen went to the Hospital 350 prisoners arrived from Gen Grants Army Chancy had the Ague again to Day.

Friday, June 24.

Clear and very warm Floyd Crandall read a letter from Capt Adams stating that Major Crandall had left there as they supposed for exchange Thomas Gagen died

As the summer days went on, more and more of the prisoners began to fall victim to the conditions of the prison. With Thomas Gagen's death the 85th NYVI had now lost 16 men to Andersonville Prison. Gagen's cause of death is listed as Fever Typhus and he is buried in grave number 2472.⁴³

When the men from the 85th NYVI received a letter from Captain Adams it was an extremely exciting event. The Confederate guards demanded money to either send or receive mail, and often they took the money but did not mail letters or give the prisoners their incoming letters. Floyd Crandall shared his letter from Captain Adams of Company C with other members of his company. In the letter, Adams spoke of the 85th NYVI's Major Walter C. Crandall, who had been Company C's 1st Lieutenant at the start of the war.⁴⁴

Saturday, June 25.

Clear and very warm 100 prisoners arrived from Gen Shermans Army great Excitement about the Exchange.

Sunday, June 26.

Clear and very warm Health quite good Reported that Thomas Gagen Died on the 24th reported that Atlanta is taken but not generally believed

Monday, June 27.

Warm and pleasant some more Prisoners arrived from Gen Grants Army drew rations of fresh beef for the First time

Tuesday, June 28.

Warm and pleasant in the Forenoon had a heavy shower in the afternoon 600 men from Grant's Army arrived today Sick doing well

The prison had received over 1,400 new prisoners and inside the stockade events were taking place that would change the prison. The stealing and fighting among the prisoners was reaching new levels. Most of the men were beginning to despair that the Union would ever rescue them from the Confederates. The new men from Sherman's army were reporting that Sherman was getting closer to Atlanta and would soon be taking it. Rumors inside the prison ran rampant and were often untrue, but the men needed something to hope for and something to talk about. They would soon have something to talk about. During the next two weeks events began to occur in Andersonville unlike anything that would happen at any other prison, North or South.

Wednesday, June 29.

Warm and pleasant in the Forenoon had a Heavy shower in the afternoon One man murdered by the raiders rations stopped until they were expired Some Found

Thursday, June 30.

Warm and pleasant in the Forenoon showers in the afternoon a few more men from Grant's Army great time hunting raiders

Friday, July 1.

Very warm and pleasant moved all of the detachments above 48 into the new stockade

Saturday, July 2.

Very warm and pleasant a little unpleasant took out one of the raiders.

The Raiders had developed at the prison long before George and the 85th NYVI arrived. The men known as the raiders were Union soldiers who stole from their fellow soldiers, bullied men in their own army and did anything else they needed to do to survive Andersonville. The Raiders were the most feared men in the camp, more feared than the Confederate guards with guns. The Raiders' favorite targets were the new arrivals, or the "fresh-fish". One or two Raiders would befriend the new arrivals and then lead the new arrivals straight into a trap sprung by other Raiders. It is estimated that, at the height of the Raiders' power, almost 500 prisoners could have been labeled as

Raiders.⁴⁵ The Raiders would prowl through the camp looking for anything that they could steal. Weapons, food, blankets and other items became bounty for the Raiders. Prisoners who were weak and sick could do little to fight the Raiders and it was not until June 29 that the other prisoners decided to take them on.

Commandant Wirz met with a group of prisoners, known as the Regulators, and listened to their stories of violence at the hands of the Raiders. These prisoners were able to convince Wirz that the prison itself would be in danger if the Raiders were not stopped. Wirz agreed to send in armed Confederate guards, along with the Regulators, to gather up the majority of the Raiders. The Raiders, warned of the approaching guards, tried to hide among the general population of the prison, but their nice clothing and overall good condition easily identified them. The entire prison population, including George, helped to gather the majority of the Raiders. The capture of the Raiders became an all-out fight, with many of the prisoners paying the Raiders back in kind for their own beatings. Wirz refused to take all 500 of the men accused of being Raiders out of the stockade because he had no place to put them. He instead took only 125 of the worst Raiders, with the prisoners assuring him that he had in that 125 all of the Raider ringleaders. Throughout the days following the Raiders' demise, the prisoners handed out their own punishments to the other Raiders left in the stockade.⁴⁶

George does not mention in the diary that on June 30 another one of his original tent mates died. Girdin Lane died of dysentery and is buried in grave number 2678.⁴⁷ George's list of deaths in the back of his diary note Gurd's death and grave number.

On July 1, George had to move his tent to a new section of the stockade. He and his entire regiment moved into a ten-acre site newly attached to the stockade. This

addition allowed the prison to expand into twenty-six and half acres of land. Prisoner work crews had built the new stockade during the month of June. This new section was not as well built as the old part and the stockade walls were not tightly drawn together. The prisoners could now see outside the stockade. All regiments with numbers higher than 48 were required to move onto the new land. This new stockade required that the old stockade wall, now in the center of the stockade, be knocked down, which allowed the men to use the old stockade wall for firewood and construction.⁴⁸ Wirz had planned to use the wood from the stockade wall, but when he returned to the prison the day after the move, he was astonished to discover that the prisoners had taken every last piece of wood for their own use. The prison stockade was now holding 26,000 men on 26 acres of land.⁴⁹

Sunday, July 3.

Clear and very Hot the rebs are referring the detachments over for something got no rations to Day man shot by guard

Monday, July 4.

Warm and pleasant not much stir in camp It is the dullest Fourth of July that I ever saw the Rebs do not celebrate it any more I worked all day trying to make a living

Tuesday, July 5.

Clear and very hot reported that Richmond surrendered the second

Wednesday, July 6.

Clear and pleasant some more men arrived from Grant's Army they report that Danville is taken and Burned

Thursday, July 7.

Clear and very warm to Day is my Nineteenth Birth Day the Dullest one that I ever saw quite unwell to Day

George Steenrod had survived two months at Andersonville, including a July 4th that meant nothing to the Confederates and his own 19th birthday. At this time there is no indication that Washington and Lydia Steenrod had seen or heard from their son in months. George had left home almost three years earlier and survived several battles, but

was now sitting in a prison camp with little to do but think about all that was going on outside and at his own home in Friendship, New York. The only comfort that George might have had was in being near men he had known most of his life.

Friday, July 8.

Clear and very warm not much going on some more prisoners arrived from Gen Grants Army among them was Perry Sisson an Ex member of Co. C, 85th N.Y.V.

Saturday, July 9.

Clear and warm in the forenoon Heavy shower in the evening 500 prisoners from Grant's Army arrived to Day. They report the railroads destroyed between here and Richmond

Sunday, July 10.

Clear and pleasant in the Forenoon Cloudy in the afternoon more prisoners arrived from Grant's Army they report Petersburg and Lynchburg taken among them was George Crumb an ex member of Co. D, 85th N.Y.V.

From June 8 to 10, 1,600 new prisoners arrived to push the stockade number to 28,000 men.⁵⁰ George mentioned that he knew two men among the new arrivals. Perry Sisson enlisted in the 85th NYVI in 1861 and was discharged for a disability in June of 1862.⁵¹ He re-enlisted in the New York Calvary, Company M and was sent to Andersonville. Sisson's stay would not be a long one, he would die from diarrhea in less than a month. He is buried in grave number 6345.⁵² George W. Crump also enlisted in the 85th NYVI and was medically discharged in June of 1863.⁵³ Crump is not listed in the Atwater report and no further information is known about him.

George, like many of the other prisoners relished information about Union victories. Trapped as they were in the stockade, any information, good or bad, deserved some talking and thinking about. In most cases the reports were incorrect, and did little but raise the hopes of the prisoners. George heard rumors that Petersburg had been taken by July 10. This was to be a false rumor. General Grant laid siege to Petersburg on June 18, but had not taken the city by July 10, and would not take the city until the last weeks

of the war. George and his fellow prisoners heard quite a few rumors about Atlanta.

General Sherman was about 30 miles from Atlanta in early June, but he would not near the city until the end of July.⁵⁴

Monday, July 11.

Clear and pleasant in the Forenoon rained some in the afternoon Six men Hung for murder 500 prisoners from Grant's army arrived they say the exchange commences Aug 1

Diary Entry in Back of Diary:

Six men hung for murdering a man for his money one broke his rope and was hung again

On July 11, George made two entries in his diary, one in the daily entry and one in the back of the diary. On this particular day at the prison an event occurred that George wrote little about in his diary. In fact, George failed to mention all the remarkable events that had been going on the previous two weeks. When the Raiders were first taken into custody, Wirz was afraid if he allowed the prisoners to deal out justice, he would have a riot on his hands. Wirz agreed to allow a trial to take place to prove the men guilty or not. In order to achieve a degree of fairness at the trial, Wirz selected a jury from prisoners who were just arriving at the prison. He also allowed the Raiders to choose their own defense attorneys. The prisoners told the jury of horrible crimes the Raiders committed against many in the prison. It took very little time before all of the Raiders were convicted. The prisoner's court found only six of the Raiders guilty enough to hang for their crimes. These six included acknowledged leader of the Raiders, Willie Collins (88th Pennsylvania Infantry), and his right hand man, Charles Curtis (5th Rhode Island Heavy Artillery); along with Patrick Delaney (83rd Pennsylvania Infantry), John Sarsfield (144th New York Infantry) and two U.S. Navy Sailors: William Rickson and Andrew Munn.⁵⁵ The other convicted raiders were given any number of other punishments ranging from floggings to head shavings.⁵⁶

Wirz, afraid of how it would look if he agreed to hang six Union prisoners of war, was going to release the six convicted Raiders back into the stockade. The Regulators had other ideas; they wanted wood to build gallows. On the morning of July 11, the Regulators constructed their gallows and waited for Henry Wirz to allow them to deal out their own form of justice.

The six Raiders to be punished by death were brought into the stockade and made the march to the prisoner constructed gallows. The prospect of hangings had brought almost a thousand citizens from surrounding towns to the prison. Wirz, fearing a riot would break out, ordered artillery to be directed at the prison. He was taking no chances that the prisoners would begin to feel they were in control. Wirz did not stay to see the hangings carried out and he removed all of his guards from inside the stockade. He wanted to make sure that no one could accuse him or his men of helping to hang Union prisoners.⁵⁷

Before the Raiders could be marched up the rickety stairs to the gallows, one of them broke free. Charles Curtis attempted to escape and run to where several of the other lesser-convicted raiders had gathered, but he had no chance of getting away from 29,000 prisoners who wanted to see him dead. When he attempted to cross the swamp, the soft mud and sewage bogged him down. Curtis was walked back to the gallows with the prisoners yelling insults at him the entire way. All six of the Raiders were asked if they would like to speak final words to the other prisoners. William Rickson had nothing to say. Andrew Munn cursed God for having been born. The most interesting offering came from Patrick Delaney. He informed the prisoners that his real name was not Delaney, it was a fake name used to collect a second bounty. Delaney went on to say that

no one at the prison knew his name, so he did not fear his family ever knowing of his actions. William Collins and John Sarsfield said little except to beg for their lives for their families' sakes. Charles Curtis simply wanted the damn thing over with. A priest began to pray for the six, with Delaney interrupting him to tell the other Raiders what to do with his stolen property. As Delaney continued to shout one of the Regulators took a watch from his pocket and told him he had two minutes. Delaney, becoming subdued at this turned to the prisoners and said "Well goodbye boys, if I've hurt any of you, I hope you will forgive me."⁵⁸

All six of the men had ropes put around their necks and white flour sacks placed over their heads. The brace to the trap door was released and all six fell. The execution, however, did not go off without some problems. Munn and Delaney were the only two who died instantly. Sarsfield, attempting to break his own neck, drew his knees up to his chest and thrust them downward. He slowly strangled to death. The rope that Collins was hanging from broke and he fell to the ground. Collins used this chance to cry and beg for mercy as prisoners spliced the rope back together. Collins was forced to watch Sarsfield struggle as he was marched back up the stairs and successfully hung. It took almost fifteen minutes for the Regulators to be assured that all six men were dead. The corpses hung for an hour before they were finally taken down, stripped of their clothes and taken to the cemetery. The prisoners had asked that the Raiders not be buried in the same cemetery as the other prisoners. Wirz granted their request and a burial site away from the others was found. In the end, the Raiders' graves did come close to being mixed in with the other prisoner's graves, but in July 1864, no one knew that the cemetery would stretch to include 13,000 graves, and that the prisoner graves would approach the

isolated position of the graves of the Raiders. Today, the Raiders' burial plot is separate from the others and at Memorial Day there are no flags placed on their graves.⁵⁹

Tuesday, July 12.

Clear and very warm 700 prisoners from Grants army arrived to Day nothing going on of any importance

Thursday, July 14.

Clear and very warm in forenoon looked like some rain in the afternoon but did not 3 raiders caught they stole six hundred dollars

Wednesday, July 20.

Clear and very warm in the Forenoon looked like rain in the afternoon One Hundred and fifty men escaped last night

George's entry on July 20 does not match the official records of the camp. The records kept at the camp do not show that 150 men escaped on the 20th or at any time during the month of July.⁶⁰ There are several possibilities for this. It is possible, but unlikely, that 150 men were able to escape without the guards taking notice. Another reason may be that the escape was embarrassing to Wirz and he did not make note of it in the official prison records.

Monday, July 25.

Clear and pleasant quite cool last night rumored that Atlanta is taken by our forces John C. Holcomb returned to camp from the hospital

Saturday, July 30.

Warm and pleasant reported that our forces are shelling Macon heard that Henry Rogers of our company was dead quite unwell in the evening

Sunday, July 31.

Clear and very warm B.B. Ballard and John Monahan of our company died this morning I helped carry Bob to the Hospital and saw the rest of our boys

The new arrivals gave hope to the prisoners when they told them, mistakenly, that Atlanta had been taken. Many prisoners believed this meant that freedom could not be far off. This belief was wrong. Atlanta was only 140 miles from the prison, and the fighting so close to the prison brought in more prisoners and on both July 28 and 29, the stockade grew by 1,000 prisoners a day. At this time there were 31,000 prisoners in the stockade

at Andersonville. The end of July also brought the number of daily deaths close to the 100 mark, on July 31 the number reached 96.⁶¹

George mentioned several friends in his diary during the closing days of July. John C. Holcomb was from George's community of Friendship and had enlisted two days after George. The 25-year-old Holcomb would survive Andersonville and go on to escape from imprisonment in March 1865.⁶²

The 85th NYVI would lose two more soldiers in late July. Robert B. Ballard was a thirty-year-old private from Richburg who survived being wounded in action at Fair Oaks, Virginia, only to die of disease at Andersonville. Ballard's official cause of death is constipation and he is buried in grave number 4457.⁶³ John Monahan, a Corporal in Company C was also from Richburg, New York. Monahan died from diarrhea and is buried in grave number 4441.⁶⁴ It is interesting to note that George, who is only 19 and younger than most of the men in his Company, goes to see how the "boys" are doing.

Tuesday, August 2.

Clear and very warm in the Forenoon had a heavy shower in the afternoon Orderly Sergeant E. W. Irish went out to the hospital to take care of his Brother

Monday, August 8.

Clear and warm in the forenoon rained some towards night Nelson Thurston of our Company died to Day of Fever and Diarrhea nothing going on

Tuesday, August 9.

Clear and pleasant in the Forenoon rained very hard in the afternoon the water rose so high that it washed down part of the stockade No rations

One of the saddest incidents in the 85th NYVI involved two brothers in George's own company. Edgar Irish and his brother George were both members of Company C, Edgar as a sergeant and George a private. Both the men were captured and sent to Andersonville after the Battle of Plymouth. George Irish went to the hospital stockade at Andersonville on June 5. On July 25, Edgar received word that his brother was in bad

shape and that he was getting worse. Edgar tried on both July 30 and 31 to see his younger brother, but was denied both times. When he finally received permission to visit the hospital at around noon on August 2, it was too late. George Hadwin Irish died at 5:30 a.m. on August 2. George Irish died of Dysentery and is buried in grave number 4587.⁶⁵ Edgar Irish survived Andersonville and went on to marry and have children. He died in 1897 in Louisiana.⁶⁶ The Irish brothers would not be the only set of brothers from Company C that would face the trial of Andersonville.

Nelson Thurston, a 25-year-old private from Clarksville died from Diarrhea. He was one of 95 men who died on August 8; he is buried in grave number 5147.⁶⁷

August 9 marked an interesting two-event day in the history of Andersonville prison. The first event would be the official recording of 33,000 prisoners housed at the stockade that was meant to hold only 10,000 men.⁶⁸ The other event was the collapse of a large section of the west wall during a rain storm. The washing away of part of the stockade took everyone, including the prisoners, by surprise. A cheer from the prisoners went up as the wall came down. The collapse of the wall produced a small spring, which gave the prisoners the first clean water they had tasted in months. The prisoners gave the spring the name Providence Spring, since they considered it a gift from God. General Winder, who was at Andersonville, quickly had a force of black laborers repair the wall. The black laborers were at Andersonville to assist in the digging of fortifications. Winder, afraid of a mass escape, ordered a cannon shot fired over the stockade. This was the only time the cannon was fired in anger at the prison.⁶⁹

Saturday, August 13.

Clear and very warm all day long heard that Asa W. Root of our company was Dead great excitement about the parole

Tuesday, August 16.

Clear and very warm in the forenoon rained some in the evening John Quinn came into my tent Chancy moved out

Thursday, August 18.

Clear and very warm in the forenoon More cool in the afternoon helped carry Chancy to the hospital.

Asa Root, who kept his own diary at Andersonville, did not live long enough to take it from the prison. The 22-year-old private from Bolivar, New York died from Anasarca (Dropsy), an accumulation of serous fluid in various tissues and body cavities, and is buried in grave number 5570.⁷⁰ John P. Quinn was a 23-year-old private from the same town as George Steenrod.⁷¹ On August 18, George's cousin, Chauncey Stebbins was taken to the hospital, where he died. George does not mention his death on the 23rd, but instead lists him in the back of the diary. Chauncey, too, died from Anasarca and is buried in grave number 6531.⁷²

Tuesday, August 23.

Clear and very warm George Voorhees of our Company died at sunrise this morning no news

George Voorhies was one of another set of brothers who served together in the 85th NYVI, Company C. When he died on August 23 from diarrhea he left behind in Andersonville a younger brother, Edwin Voorhies. Edwin had enlisted in the army in September of 1861, his older brother enlisted during a second call for men in August of 1862.⁷³ George would become grave number 6682, but unlike the Irish brothers, neither of the Voorhies brothers would survive Andersonville. Edwin would become grave number 11507 on October 26, dying from scurvy.⁷⁴ On August 23, 1864, 127 men died, marking the largest total of deaths at Andersonville in a single day.⁷⁵

Saturday, August 27.

Clear and pleasant with a cool breeze all day long rained some in the evening O. Rogers of Co E died to night

Wednesday, August 31.

Clear and very J.M. Vanvelzor Wm Manderville Edwin Doty and Charles W. Dart Died to Day nothing going on

August 1864 was the toughest month at the prison. Almost 3,000 of the 13,000 deaths occurred in this month, with an average of 100 men dying per day.⁷⁶ The hot August sun beat down on the prisoners, the southern humidity was stifling, and they had little water and poor food. The 85th NYVI lost 175 men at Andersonville; at least 53 of those men died during the month of August.⁷⁷ George Steenrod knew seven of the men who died during the month of August. Orra S. Rogers of Company E, was a 30 year old 1st Sergeant from Alfred. He died of scurvy and is buried in grave number 7208.⁷⁸ George wrote of four men dying on the 31st, but three of the men have official death dates of September 2.⁷⁹ The sheer number of deaths caused men to be buried a day or two after their deaths. Dorence Atwater, the soldier recording the deaths made his notations on the day they were buried. This may in part explain the difference between the Steenrod diary and the Atwater list.

Private John VanVelzor of Company I was from Richburg; his death was from Dysentery and he is buried in grave number 7564.⁸⁰ Private William Manderville of Company F was from Friendship, his death was from scurvy and he is buried in grave number 7600.⁸¹ Private Charles Dart of George's own company was from Richburg; his death was from Dysentery and he is buried in grave number 7562.⁸²

Private Edwin Doty of Company I, died from Diarrhea and is buried in grave number 9416. Doty's death is not officially listed until September 20.⁸³ George may have mistakenly thought Doty was dead. Doty may have entered the hospital and George was unaware of that, he may have heard a rumor, or some unknown event occurred.

The Confederate Government began to get nervous about Andersonville as Union troops moved South. The fall of Atlanta on September 2 caused panic throughout the South, and, with the capture of Jonesborough, supply lines between Atlanta and Macon were cut off. It now became necessary to evacuate Andersonville and disperse the prisoners to other Southern prison camps.⁸⁴

Tuesday, September 6.

Clear and very warm Eighteen detachments ordered to be ready to march at a moments notice great excitement

Wednesday, September 7.

Clear and very warm 5 detachments left as we suppose for our lines great excitement about exchange

Thursday, September 8.

Clear and very warm 13 detachments left to day

Friday, September 9.

Clear and very warm more prisoners left for exchange in the night.

Many of the prisoners believed that they were leaving the prison because of an exchange of prisoners by the two governments. The Confederate Government had no such plan in mind, at that time. Instead of an exchange, the prisoners were being transferred to different prisons. On the first four days of the prisoner transfer, over 4,000 prisoners from Andersonville were shipped to prisons in North and South Carolina.⁸⁵

The prison population in the stockade began to decrease by drastic numbers. The transfers did not, however, stop the number of men dying every day. The number continued to stay in the hundreds throughout much of September.⁸⁶

Saturday, September 10.

Clear and very warm we were ordered to be ready to take the cars at a moments notice up all night

Sunday, September 11.

Clear and very warm left Andersonville, Pa by rail and came to Macon then took the cars for Savannah

September 10 had to have been a day filled with great excitement and hope for members of the 85th NYVI. Many wanted to be the next to leave behind the hell of the last few months. In just six days, from the 8th to the 13th, the prison population would decrease by over 10,000 prisoners. On September 13 alone, almost 4,000 prisoners left the stockade for other prisons.⁸⁷ The men who were leaving had to be healthy enough to walk and to ride in the boxcars taking them north. The sick were left in Andersonville, where many of them would die before final transports could be made.

George and other surviving members of his company were finally able to leave the prison on September 11. It had to be with overwhelming feelings of relief, despair and fear that George and the others left Andersonville. George and many others had come to the prison in a relatively healthy condition and they were leaving starved and sickly. George had to have been relieved to have survived, when so many others had not, but with that may have come guilt at surviving. George and the others left Andersonville with the knowledge that they were leaving behind the sick and the bodies of so many friends who had died at the prison. There was also the fear of the unknown, because even though George and the others were leaving the prison, their futures were still with their Confederate guards. It had to have been with heavy hearts and enough nightmares to last a lifetime that George and the others left the hell of Andersonville Prison.

Chapter 7 ❖ Release, Resolution, and Reconciliation

George Washington Steenrod left Andersonville on September 11, a soldier who had seen some of the worst war had to offer. While in Andersonville, George had watched as twenty-four men he knew succumbed to illness. George had seen more death come to his regiment through prison, than he had fighting in the war. In battle George had seen the agony and carnage that forms of ammunition caused the human body. These deaths could be quick, but they could also be bloody and horrific. Most of the deaths in Andersonville, excluding those deaths caused by gunshots from guards or beatings by the Raiders, came from the slow and agonizing process of the deterioration of the body. While George was no stranger to disease, the conditions in the stockade at Andersonville allowed for disease to spread on an altogether different level.

The conditions under which George lived at Andersonville violated some of the basics of human dignity that we now take for granted. There was no privacy at the prison, every moment of time in Andersonville was spent in the open, under the watchful eyes of 30,000 other men. There could be very few secrets among the men at the prison, because they lived side by side. These men ate, slept, washed, relieved themselves, and did everything in front of thousands of other men. In most cases, even death came in front of many other men.

George had managed to somehow survive it all, heat, cold, rain, poor rations, little clean water, disease everywhere, the boredom of sitting and doing nothing for days on end, the deaths of friends and even a family member, the Raiders, and the sheer helplessness of being a prisoner of war. He had hung on through death after death, and the countless frustrating moments of untrue rumors of exchange and parole. It must have

seemed to him that Friendship, New York was not only thousands of miles away, but in a different land and time.

George and the remaining members of Company C left Andersonville with great hope that this prison would be the last they would experience. Unfortunately, the Confederate Government was not ready to concede defeat in Richmond or on the battlefield. For George Washington Steenrod and the other prisoners at Andersonville, this would mean several more months in Confederate prisons.

George and the other somewhat healthy members of the 85th NYVI left Andersonville on the evening of September 11 on the same railroad that had brought them to the prison. The Union prisoners were loaded onto boxcars on the South Western Railroad line about 6:00 p.m. and taken back through Macon. Sometime in the night they changed rail lines at Macon and headed towards Savannah on the Central Georgia line.¹

Monday, September 12.

Clear and very warm arrived at Savannah this morning changed cars and came to Charleston S.C. and went into camp

Tuesday, September 13.

Clear and very warm Laid in the sun all Day long saw some of the shells Burst in the city that our Forces threw Camped one mile from town

The cars arrived in Savannah early on the morning of the 12, and the prisoners changed from box cars to flat cars for the ride to Charleston on the Charleston and Savannah rail line. (See Figure 13) When George and the others arrived in Charleston they were forced to wait on the boxcars for two hours, and then forced to march a mile to the stockade at the Charleston Race Course. For George and the remaining members of the 85th NYVI who made it to Charleston, the new location was a welcome change from Andersonville. The men received better food than had been rationed at Andersonville,

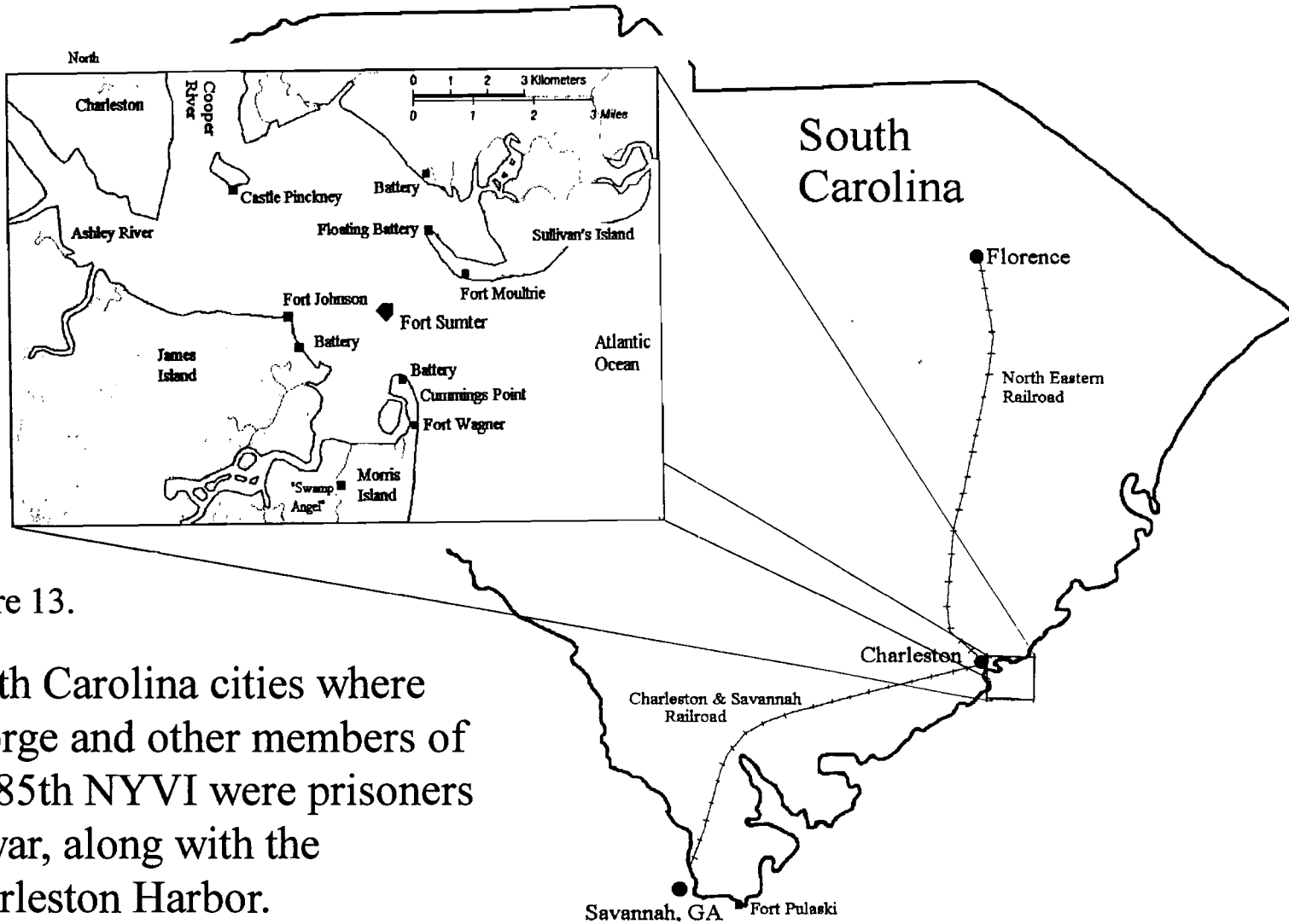


Figure 13.

South Carolina cities where George and other members of the 85th NYVI were prisoners of war, along with the Charleston Harbor.

and the breeze from the Atlantic Ocean, which the Plymouth Pilgrims had not felt since they left Plymouth, was a welcome relief from the blazing Georgia sun. The land was also covered with a fine green grass that the prisoners relished in seeing for the first time in months.² While it was still impossible to forget they were prisoners of war, the change in location did much to help in improving the spirits of the men.

On September 13, George made an entry concerning the shelling that was happening near the city of Charleston. The shells from Union forces that George referred to were those that Major General John Foster directed toward Fort Sumter from Morris Island, in the hope of breaking the Confederate hold on the fort. The Union army had been attempting to capture Fort Sumter since the fort fell on April 14, 1861 starting the Civil War. In July 1863, the Union was finally able to secure Fort Wagner on the end of Morris Island. This allowed for a continued assault on Fort Sumter for the following two years.³ Even after several attempts to take back Fort Sumter, the Union Army had not succeeded when George and the other Andersonville prisoners were moved to the city. The knowledge that the Union Army was so close gave the prisoners hope. Charles Mosher summed it up best in his diary entry: "It seems good to think that our friends are so near, even if we cannot get to them."⁴

Wednesday, September 14.

Clear and cool Breeze all Day A Reb Colonel tried to get 300 men to go outside and work for the confederacy at whatever they told them to do Answer in morning

Diary Entry in Back of Diary:

they were of mind to tell them to do and agreed to furnish each man one suit of clothes plenty to eat whiskey and tobacco

There are two instances in the diary where it appears that George did not have enough room to say everything he wanted to say about a particular day. The first was on July 11, the day the Raiders hung at Andersonville. The second, on September 14,

concerns the way in which Confederate officers were attempting to convince Union soldiers to work for the Confederacy in exchange for clothes. In the coming months the question of possibly switching allegiances and working for the Confederacy became a much debated and heated problem among the prisoners.

Saturday, September 17.

Cloudy but pleasant with a cool breeze my two tent mates G.W. Phelps & John Quinn went to Hospt & Frank Spencer came into tent with me heavy firing fire in town

Sunday, September 18.

Clear and pleasant did not get any rations until after dark Our men still Bombarding the city Large Fire in town set by our shells

George's tent mates John Quinn and George Phelps were both mentioned in the diary previous to September 17. Quinn and Phelps were close in age to George and the three knew each other from Friendship. George's new tent mate, Frank Spencer, also from Friendship, was one of the few members of Company C who was only eighteen when he enlisted.⁵ It is impossible to know for sure if Frank Spencer was eighteen, he could very well have been one of the young men who lied to get into the service, as George had done in the fall of 1861. Frank Spencer was also different from any of George's other friends mentioned in the diary. Frank Spencer enlisted in Company C as a private, but when he re-enlisted in January of 1864, he was appointed musician for the company.⁶

The difference between Charleston and Andersonville had a lot to do with the fact that Andersonville had been isolated, Charleston was right in the middle of the action. There was constant action in or near Charleston, which gave the prisoners some hope. Fort Sumter had been bombarded daily since mid-August. Major General John Foster was determined to dislodge the 300-man Fort Sumter garrison. Almost 1,000 shells were fired at the fort on August 17, when Foster began his bombardment plan. Foster did

succeed in shattering the fort's brick walls and reducing them to ruins, but the fort continued to rebuild and refused to surrender. Foster attempted on September 9, to take the fort by force, but the results were five lost boats and 124 dead soldiers. Foster would continue his assault on the fort throughout the time that George and the others were in Charleston, but to no avail. The fort would never be surrendered to the Union Army. It was instead evacuated on February 17, 1865 as General Sherman's troops advanced north from Savannah.⁷

Wednesday, September 21.

Cloudy but quite pleasant heard that Captain Adams was down town in the Officers Prison also the rest of the Plymouth officers still firing in the city

Friday, September 23.

Clear and very warm the Flag of truce boats met to Day Nothing going on of importance

Wednesday, September 28.

Clear and warm Nothing transpired of any importance until Evening when our forces commenced a Brisk firing on the Defences of the city

Saturday, October 1.

Morning opened rainy and very unpleasant but Old Sol soon cleared the clouds away 1,500 men left for we don't know where

In early September the Plymouth Pilgrim officers were moved from Macon to Savannah, Georgia. They were then moved from Savannah to Charleston, only they were moved to downtown Charleston, where they would be under the fire of the Union Army. In late July Confederate officers in Charleston, angered over the continued assault on Fort Sumter and Charleston, had begun to put Union officers in buildings in downtown Charleston. The location made it possible for the Union Army to unintentionally shell the prisoners. When the Plymouth Pilgrim officers were added in September it put almost 1600 Union officers in danger of being killed by their own army's shells. Major General Foster retaliated for this move by placing six hundred Rebel officers under fire on Morris

Island.⁸ Union forces on Morris Island were forced to use every precaution when firing their shells at the city, for fear of hitting Union officers.(See Figure 13)

After months of rumors about paroles and exchanges the men at Charleston were given new hope that the end of their imprisonment was near. George and the other men at Charleston had two different ways to determine when the Flag of truce boats or the commissioners of exchange were meeting. A meeting was indicated when the shelling near the city was stopped to allow the officers to meet in safety. The Charleston newspapers also gave the prisoners information about possible paroles or exchanges of the prisoners.⁹ At this point in the war, all exchanges had to be worked out among officers on the two sides, since the two governments were no longer seeking exchanges. The prisoners, still hoping for paroles or exchanges, began to slowly adapt to another prison.

The prison stockade at Charleston resembled the one at Andersonville in design, only, at forty acres, it was much larger. The number of men was also considerably lower, with somewhere between 10,000 to 15,000 prisoners inside the Charleston stockade.¹⁰ The Charleston stockade was not to be a permanent home for the prisoners, but instead a holding facility for the Florence stockade that was still being built. In late September large numbers of men began leaving the Charleston Stockade for Florence and its unfinished stockade. Many of the prisoners in Charleston were moved before completion of the stockade because of disease at the Charleston stockade. The diseases, severe cases of Yellow Fever and Smallpox, not only affected the prisoners, but the guards as well.¹¹ The Charleston stockade would continue to be emptied until the early part of October.

Tuesday, October 4.

Morning opened clear and warm 1,500 men left here for Florence this morning we were ordered to be ready to leave tomorrow morning at 5 A.M.

Wednesday, October 5.

Clear and pleasant Capt Adams sent \$200.00 to be distributed amongst the company
Ordered to leave in the morning had the colic in the evening

Thursday, October 6.

Clear and warm started from Charleston at 9 A.M. for Florence a distance of 104 miles
arrived there at six P.M. Elem Waterman and Henry Bollsover were shot trying to escape

In early October some of the Plymouth Pilgrim officers were able to receive passes to see the enlisted soldiers held at the Charleston stockade. What they saw shocked and amazed many of them. The soldiers in the Charleston stockade hardly resembled the men they had left outside the gates of Andersonville. Many of them were so concerned about the conditions of their men they sent money to the prison. George noted that Company C Captain, Samuel Adams, sent money for George and the other members of the company. Adams was not alone in doing this for his men. Company B's Captain, Chauncey Aldrich, also sent money to his men.¹²

It was on the morning of October 6, that the remaining members of the 85th NYVI were ordered to board the boxcars that would take them to Florence, South Carolina. During the trip north on these boxcars, a shooting occurred that George made note of in his diary. While George simply gave basic information about two men shot trying to escape, Charlie Mosher elaborates on the events that took place that morning.

According to Mosher's diary, Elam Wetmore, and another soldier, Ira Deyo, refused to ride in the boxcars that would take them to Florence. The two boarded the cars, but while passing through a woody area, Deyo jumped from the train and was able to disappear into the woods without making a sound. Wetmore's luck was not as good, and as he jumped from the train he landed on a dry scrub tree which give him away. The Confederate guards, who were sitting on top of the boxcars opened fire on the escaping

prisoner. When the guards stopped to check on Wetmore, they found that he had been riddled with bullets and was dead. They find no trace of Deyo, and the boxcars continued north towards Florence. Deyo was later recaptured and, eleven years after Wetmore and Deyo's escape attempt, Deyo returned to the area and was able to locate where Wetmore was buried. Deyo had Wetmore's remains removed and reinterred at the National Cemetery in Florence, South Carolina.¹³

On the same day George mentions Henry Bolsover, a First Sergeant in Company I. Mosher never mentions Bolsover and George does not explain the conditions under which Bolsover was shot. The New York Adjutant-General report indicates that Bolsover was shot while attempting to escape from confinement at Florence. Bolsover was not killed while trying to escape, he was wounded, and would die of his wounds on November 11, 1864.¹⁴

After the excitement of the day, the 85th NYVI made it to Florence between 6:00 and 7:00 p.m.. They had traveled the North Eastern railroad line the entire 104 miles from Charleston. Because of the late hour and the weather conditions, the men were taken to a large field, where they spread their blankets and slept on the cold, wet earth.¹⁵

Friday, October 7.

The morning opened rainy and very unpleasant out in the rain all night and then went into the stockade

Monday, October 10.

Clear and cold in the morning warm in P.M. Frank, George & myself dug a hole in the ground cold in the evening

Tuesday, October 11.

Clear and cold there is a great many taking the Oath of Allegiance to the Confederate Government

On the morning following their arrival in Florence, the men were able to see the Florence stockade in the daylight. In the light of day, the Florence stockade looked

strikingly similar to the one they had left in Georgia. The stockade was in fact very much like the stockade at Andersonville. It was roughly the same size, and it had a fifteen to twenty-foot stockade wall, along with a creek running through the stockade. However, there were some differences between the two stockades. The dead line at Florence was a furrow in the ground made by a plow and the hospital was located inside the stockade. (See Figure 14) In October 1864, the Florence stockade was holding less men and, at the time, was less filthy than Andersonville.¹⁶

On October 10, George, along with his tent mates Frank Spencer and George Phelps, were digging a hole for two possible reasons. The first was for a well, in which they could find water. The second was for a shebang, where they would need to dig out an area of earth to spread some sort of cover over.

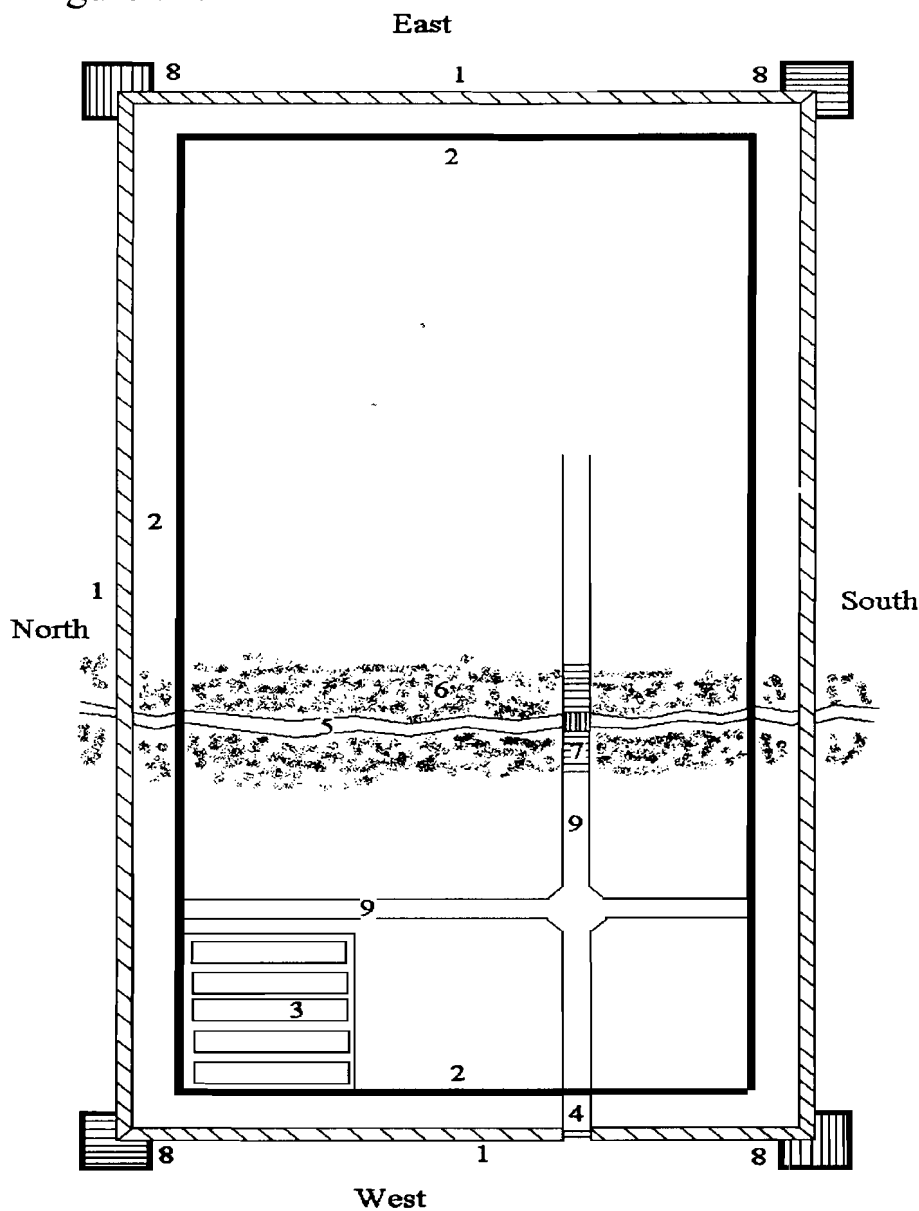
October 11 is the first time George mentions other prisoners taking the Oath of Allegiance to the Confederate Government. While in Charleston several of the men had agreed to help work for the Confederacy in exchange for new clothes and other items. At Florence, the prisoners would be asked not only to assist the Confederate Army, but change allegiance from the Union to the Confederacy. This idea set off a firestorm among the prisoners. It was unthinkable for many of the men to even consider switching sides. While never saying outright that he disagreed with other men taking the Oath of Allegiance to the Confederacy, George's entries show he did disapprove of their actions. Charlie Mosher on the other hand makes his feelings about these men very clear: "The oath I took when I first enlisted and when I re-enlisted will not permit me to take any other, much less to this God-forsaken, rotten Confederacy."¹⁷

Sunday, October 16.

Clear and warm all Day long heard that Thos Martin was Dead two men that took the Oath of Allegiance & tried to escape were shot by the Rebs

Florence Stockade

Figure 14.



- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Stockade | 6. Swamp |
| 2. Dead Line | 7. Causeway & Bridge |
| 3. Hospital | 8. Elevated Platform
for Artillery |
| 4. Prison Gate | 9. Streets |
| 5. Brook (Pie Branch) | |

Plan for the Florence Stockade
(Robert Kellogg, *Life and Death in Rebel Prisons*)

Tuesday, October 18.

Cloudy and cold with some rain the chilliest Day that I have seen in the Confederacy

Tuesday, October 25.

Clear and cold in the morning more mild in the afternoon Phelps taken worse great excitement about exchange

Thursday, October 27.

Clear and cold nothing going on Silas Clarke died

Friday, October 28.

Clear with a chilly wind Geo. W. Phelps & O.E. Lecompton of our company Died during the night

Death and disease continued to make its presence known to George and the other members of the 85th NYVI. The rumor that George heard about Thomas Martin's death was true. Martin from Friendship and a member of Company C, died on October 10.¹⁸ The weather conditions did not help the sick and starving troops. Silas Clark, also from Friendship and a member of Company F died from disease on October 27.¹⁹ George mentions that his tent mate George Phelps is worsening on October 13 and 25. Three days after his last mention of Phelps, George notes that Phelps has died.

George Phelps is an example of how a man can get lost in the war. The New York Adjutant General report lists Phelps as captured in action at Plymouth, but have no further of record of him. Phelps is listed in the Andersonville database as a prisoner, but the state of New York seems to have misplaced him. Phelps does not have a grave marker in Florence, and he is believed to be one of the many unknown soldiers buried at the Florence Cemetery.

George's mention of an O.E. Lecompton is something of a mystery and another example of how a man could get lost in the Civil War. O.E. Lecompton is not a member of the 85th NYVI, he is not in the Andersonville database, and he has no grave marker at the National Cemetery in Florence. It is possible that the man George is referring to is

Ozelous E. Lamphere (name also spelled Lanphere and Lanpheur) of 85th NYVI Company C. George's spelling of names is erratic and he may be referring to the odd sounding name of Lamphere when he mentions Lecompton. The death date of Ozelous Lamphere would be the only way to verify if Lecompton is really Lamphere. The problem is that official records for Lamphere indicate he was captured at Plymouth, but there is no further record after his capture. The other thing that suggests that George would mention Ozelous Lamphere in his diary is that Lamphere was from Friendship, New York.²⁰

Thursday, November 3.

Cold and rainy both Day & night Passed the Day in my tent water almost drowned us out

Saturday, November 5.

Clear and cold with some wind heard that Plymouth was recaptured two hundred and Seventy Five took the Oath of Allegiance

Tuesday, November 8.

Cloudy & warm great excitement in camp voting to get the sensation of the camp for president Old Abe leads the van

Tuesday, November 15.

Clear and pleasant great excitement about exchange

As their imprisonment continued at Florence, George and the others had very few highlights to their days. One came on November 5, when the men at Florence learned that Plymouth had been retaken by Union troops. The men were excited to learn that the ram Albemarle had been sunk, since they blamed the capture of Plymouth on the presence and actions of the ram.²¹ The other event that caused excitement in the camp was the 1864 presidential election. The men at Plymouth took part in the election in their own way. They voted by beans, red for Lincoln, and white for their former commander, George McClellan, with Lincoln winning..²²

Sunday, November 20.

Cloudy & misty all Day long two Battalions left here to Day Sherman is reported a few miles from Augusta with 5 corps

Saturday, November 26.

Clear and warm quite cold during the night the rebs commenced paroling the sick from Florence

Friday, December 2.

Clear & pleasant finished scalding my Blankets to kill the Lice No news

As November drew to an end, the Confederate government began paroling the sickest of the prisoners in the Florence stockade. This came about due to the falling strength of the Confederate Government, and their inability to continue maintaining prison camps. The other reason is one that George mentions on November 20. General Sherman's Union troops were closing in on both Augusta and Savannah, Georgia.

George Washington Steenrod's days as a prisoner of war were numbered. On December 2, George made his final entry in the diary he had carried from Plymouth to Andersonville, on into Charleston, and finally into Florence. Sometime in the days following his final diary entry, George underwent a physical exam by a Confederate doctor, to determine if he was sick enough to be paroled. The Confederate doctor made the decision that George was ill enough to be paroled.²³

George and others that were paroled were taken by train on the North Eastern line back to Charleston, South Carolina. This would be the third time that George made the trip between Charleston and Florence during the war. On December 11, the Confederate Government officially paroled Union Private George Washington Steenrod.²⁴ George and most of the other paroled soldiers from Florence were shipped to Camp Parole, Annapolis, Maryland. On December 15, George reported to Camp Parole and two days

later was on the list of men in the hospital at Camp Parole. George's record from the General Hospital at Camp Parole, Maryland gives a diagnosis of scurvy.²⁵

George was now back in the care of the Union Army, and was closer to home than he had been in three years. In the closing month of 1864 George recuperated at the hospital at Camp Parole. For many other Union soldiers the war continued and the level of fighting escalated.

1864 was the year that turned the war in the Union favor. President Lincoln finally found the general that he believed would completely turn the tide for the Union, Major General Ulysses S. Grant. In May, Grant began his drive toward Richmond, and throughout May and June, Grant and his army met Lee and his forces numerous times. In July, Confederate forces attempted to stop General Sherman's march towards Atlanta, but were unsuccessful. In September, Atlanta fell to Sherman and General Sheridan drove Confederate General Jubal Early out of the Shenandoah Valley. In November, Abraham Lincoln defeated George McClellan to remain President of the United States. The Union army was occupying more Confederate land than at any other time and on December 22, General Sherman's troops occupied Savannah.²⁶ The Union was looking ahead to 1865 from a good position, and for many in the North it appeared that the Union was finally making great strides toward winning the war.

By early 1865 it was clear that the Union Army would prevail. Fort Fisher, protecting Wilmington, North Carolina, fell to the Union Army and Navy. In mid-February, Sherman's troops occupied Columbia, South Carolina, and the last open Confederate port in Wilmington fell to Union forces. The Confederacy attempted to continue the war by allowing slaves to serve in the army, guaranteeing them their

freedom.²⁷ The Confederate States of America was quickly being forced into submission by the Union army, compounded by its own internal problems.

George remained in the hospital at Camp Parole until February 9, 1865, and then reported to the camp at Camp Parole.²⁸ George remained at Camp Parole and on March 21, George wrote a letter to an unnamed Colonel asking for his veteran furlough. The colonel was most likely Colonel Fardella of the 85th NYVI. In the letter George respectfully asked that he be allowed to take the furlough he was awarded in January of 1864 when he re-enlisted.²⁹ George's prisoner of war records do not show the exact dates that he was granted for his furlough, but there are three dates that supply some clues. George wrote his letter on March 21, so the furlough was granted at some point after that date. (See Figure 15) The next date that indicates George was granted his furlough is his wedding date. On April 2, 1865 George married Louise May Axtell in Friendship, New York.³⁰ The furlough allowed George to go home to New York for the first time in over three years. However, the newlyweds would not have long to celebrate their marriage or George's return, as a now healthy George had to report back to his regiment.

In April 1865, the 85th NYVI were in many different locations around the Eastern United States. Company A, the only company escaping capture at Plymouth, had continued to fight in the war after the Battle of Plymouth. They had stayed at Roanoke Island until August 1864, when they were granted furloughs, in hopes that the men would help in raising a new company for the now dilapidated regiment. The regiment would grow to include Company L, but the two companies enrollment together never exceeded 180. Company A and Company L of the 85th NYVI returned and remained at Roanoke

Typed Version of George's Letter:

Camp Parole, Annapolis, M.d.
 2nd Battallion
 March 21th 1865.

Colonel
 Sir

I have the honor to apply
 for a veteran furlough. I reenlisted
 at Plymouth N.C. June 1st 1864. Was
 Captured April 20th 1864. not having
 rec'd my furlough which I am entitled
 to by virtue of reenlistment. I respectfully
 request that I may be granted one.
 I am very Respectfully Yours

Geo. W. Steenrod
 Priv. Co. C 85 Regt N.Y.V.

George Steenrod's
 letter to 85th NYVI
 Colonel Fardello,
 requesting his
 re-enlistment furlough
 in the Spring of 1865.

Figure 15.

Copy of request from the Military Records of
 Private George W. Steenrod, Co. C 85th NYVI.

*Camp Parole Annapolis M.d.
 2nd Battallion
 March 21th 1865.*

*Colonel
 Sir,*

*I have the honor to apply
 for a veteran furlough. I reenlisted
 at Plymouth N.C. June 1st 1864. Was
 Captured April 20th 1864, not having
 rec'd my furlough which I am entitled
 to by virtue of reenlistment. I respectfully
 request that I may be granted one.
 I am very respectfully Yours*

*Geo. W. Steenrod
 Priv. Co. C 85 Regt N.Y.V.*

Island until March 1865. They were ordered to help in securing a path for General Sherman and his troops. The two companies took part in the battle at Wise's Fork in North Carolina and were sent to help in guarding the Neuse River near Kinston, North Carolina.³¹

The other 85th NYVI companies had been separated by a number of different reasons after the Battle of Plymouth. The 85th NYVI lost seven men in the Battle of Plymouth and six more died from wounds sustained at the battle. The 85th NYVI also recorded seventeen missing in action after the Battle of Plymouth. George's diary helps to show that two of the missing men, George Phelps and Ozelous Lanphere, were not lost, but died later at Florence and were buried in unmarked graves. A database of Andersonville Prisoners also show the two were taken to Andersonville, and both left the prison in September. The 85th NYVI also lost several men to various other deaths, these included a suicide, drowning, two escape attempts, and several deaths from the Battle at Wise's Fork.³² Then there is the matter of the 85th NYVI men who died at Andersonville Prison. It is almost impossible to gauge the exact number of men from the 85th NYVI that were held at Andersonville. However, the Andersonville database lists about 350 men from the regiment at the prison. The 85th NYVI was one of the most complete regiments to be imprisoned at Andersonville. It is known that 175 of the 350 men detained at Andersonville died at the prison and are buried in the Andersonville National Cemetery.³³ These numbers show a 50% death rate for the men of the 85th NYVI who were sent to the prison. George listed twenty-four of them somewhere in his diary. All twenty-four that George took an interest in have gravestone markers at the Andersonville National Cemetery.³⁴

The 85th NYVI also lost men while they were imprisoned at Charleston and Florence, South Carolina. George's diary has entries for four men dying at Florence, and two of these men are not counted in a final total of deaths by imprisonment, because they are listed as missing in action. The 85th NYVI continued to lose men to disease after they were paroled at Camp Parole, and almost 100 members of the regiment were not released from Florence until mid-March of 1865. These men would not return to active service in the regiment after their paroles.³⁵

George was one of the men well enough to return to the regiment. He left New York at some point after his marriage and reported to a camp in Alexandria, Virginia on April 7. George rejoined the remainder of the 85th NYVI on April 15 at Mosely Hall in North Carolina. George and the other 150 men left in the regiment were assigned to guard the bridge by the Neuse River.³⁶ George actually arrived at Mosely Hall after Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to General Grant on April 12. It is impossible to know where George learned of the end of the war, but it is a certainty that he was one of many that rejoiced at the news. George and the remaining 85th NYVI spent the end of April and the months of May and June guarding the Neuse River bridge. In mid-June they were sent to New Bern, North Carolina where they were mustered out of the U.S. Army on June 27, 1865. Most of the other surviving members of the regiment were mustered out in Elmira, New York and other members were mustered out in various places on the East Coast. George and the men mustered out in New Bern made their way home to New York in the early part of July 1865.³⁷

George's return home was a happy blessing for Washington and Lydia Steenrod, along with their entire family. The end of war brought the Allegany county men home,

and this time it was to stay. But along with the joy at coming home, there was the pain of knowing many others were never coming home. In the time George was away, he had suffered illness during the early part of the war and during his time at Andersonville and after he left the prison. George had been to battle and he had lived through Andersonville, and through all of it he had personally experienced the deaths of over thirty men. Some of these men were close friends, others were childhood playmates, and others were simply men from the same town and county. George had also watched his second cousin, Chauncey Stebbins, slowly fade away as a prisoner in Andersonville. He had seen good men die and bad men live for reasons that were unexplainable. George had also lost his younger brother to the war and that pain stayed with him his entire life.

George was one of the lucky few who returned to Friendship, New York. The village, with a population of 1,900 in 1860, lost fifty-six men in the war, and of this number, fourteen died at Andersonville. George had seen his entire regiment decimated by the battle of Plymouth and the imprisonment that came after the battle. The 85th NYVI lost a total of 341 men to disease, of this number, 253 of them died while imprisoned in a Confederate prison. In direct contrast to this, the 85th NYVI lost only twenty-six men to battle deaths.³⁸ These numbers illustrate what the real killer of the Civil War was, not the gun, but disease. George Washington Steenrod managed somehow to escape both of these killers and come home to his family and his new wife. However, the war had left brutal scars not only on the land of the Eastern United States, but on all the men who fought in this not so “Civil” War.

Chapter 8 ❖ Citizen Soldier to Farmer

The end of the Civil War brought both highs and lows for the population of the United States. The Union was celebrating a victory for democracy, but was at the same time mourning the lost leader of its reunited country. Lincoln's assassination sent shock waves and a wave of mourning throughout the North. The months following the Confederacy's surrender brought men back to their families, but for many families it also brought the realization that their sons, fathers, husbands, and brothers would never be coming home. The war had taken a toll on all of the American people and each side had death totals exceeding 300,000 men. In the South the war had taken a toll on the land. While the North had seen few large-scale battles, Gettysburg and Antietam being the exceptions, the South had seen its land destroyed by battle and Sherman's March to the Sea. The Confederacy had crumbled and its people and land would pay a heavy price for their fight for independence.

The George Washington Steenrod who returned to Friendship, New York had experienced life in ways his own father and mother could not imagine. He had left New York four years earlier at the age of sixteen, but returned to his parent's home an older and experienced twenty-year-old man. He returned to a town that had been seen a large loss of life, and a family that had lost two of its own, George's younger brother Charles and his second cousin, Chauncey Stebbins. But among all the hurt and pain came the joy of his new marriage and a chance to start a civilian life.

George's marriage on April 2, 1865 is something of a surprise, considering George never mentioned Louisa May Axtell in his diary. His choice of a wife is not a surprise, however, and although it seems that the marriage happened quickly, the

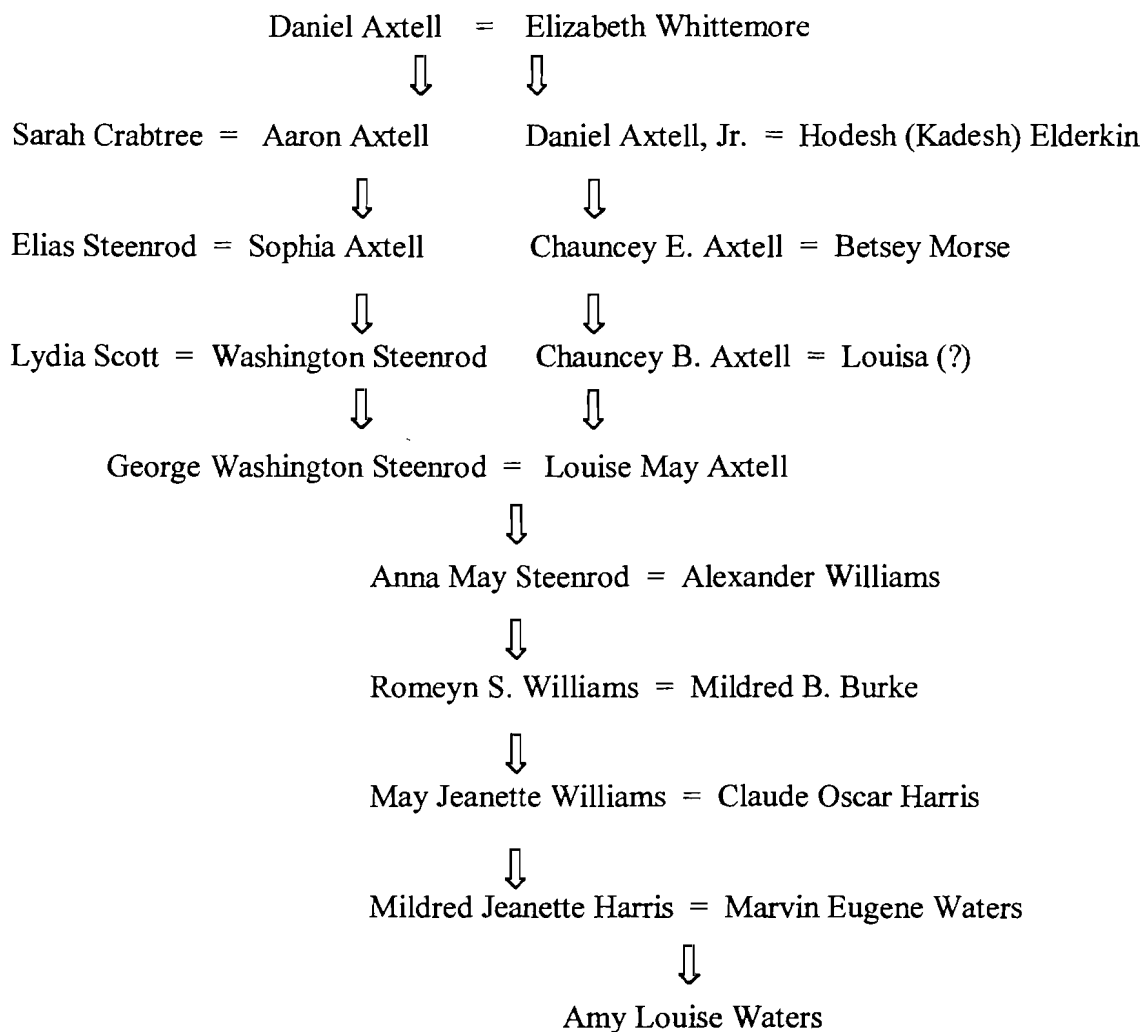
courtship may have happened over a long period of time. George Steenrod and Louisa May Axtell had known each other their entire lives, and their marriage joined a Steenrod and an Axtell for the second time in Allegany County.

George Steenrod and his new wife shared a common set of great great grandparents, which made them third cousins. (See Figure 16) George's paternal great-grandfather, Aaron Axtell, was one of the first settlers in Allegany County and other members of his extended family followed him to the new county. The family members included Aaron's younger brother Daniel, and Daniel's son Chauncey E. Axtell. Chauncey E. Axtell married Betsey Morse and the two started their own family in Friendship, New York. Sometime in the 1840's, their son, Chauncey B., married Louisa (maiden name unknown) in Friendship. Chauncey and Louisa had two children, Theodore and Louisa, before Chauncey's death. Louisa Axtell's daughter, Louisa May, was only two months old when her father died in October 1847. The young widow raised her two children in the townships of Wirt and Friendship, near her late husband's parents. Allegany County federal census records from 1860 indicate that the houses of Washington Steenrod and Louisa Axtell were in close proximity and the Steenrod and Axtell children attended school together.¹

Louise May Axtell was only fourteen when George Steenrod enlisted to fight in the Civil War. She spent the years of the war with her widowed mother, not far from the Steenrod Home in Friendship Township. While it is impossible to know the exact events that transpired to bring the two young people into marriage, it is known that George Steenrod did not return to Friendship until Louisa May Axtell was seventeen. The two either had a long courtship throughout the war, or they renewed their acquaintance when

Figure 16.

Direct Descendants of Daniel and Elizabeth Axtell



George returned home for his furlough. In either case Justice of the Peace J.J. Stebbins, George's great-uncle, married the two on April 2, 1865 in Friendship.²

When George mustered out of the service at New Bern, North Carolina he had been paid only \$60 of the \$400 bounty he had been promised with his re-enlistment.³ While it is impossible to know for certain that George was paid, he more than likely received his pay when he traveled through the military depot at Elmira, New York on his way home to Friendship. In August 1865, George, now twenty, and Louisa, seventeen, were ready to set up their household and start their marriage. The couple were living close to both George's parents and Louisa's mother, and it would not be long before they had a family of their own.

However, the country as a whole was still coming to grips with the terrible war that had ravaged it for four long years. In May 1865 the United States government captured and imprisoned Jefferson Davis at Fort Monroe, Virginia. Davis would spend two years in confinement, but the government was never able to connect Davis to criminal acts. However, the Union still felt the need to make someone pay for the actions of the Confederate government. The focus of the Union was put upon a man that George Steenrod was familiar with, Commandant of the Andersonville Prison Camp, Captain Henry Wirz. On May 7, 1865 Henry Wirz was arrested at Andersonville on charges of murdering Union prisoners of war. Wirz claimed he was exempt from prosecution due to the surrender terms that General Sherman had accepted from General Johnston. By the end of May, Wirz had been placed under secure confinement at the old Capitol Prison in Washington D.C.⁴

The trial of Henry Wirz began in August 1865. The public convicted Henry Wirz before he was ever convicted by a court of law. The trial was filled with impropriety and false testimony, and the defense was given very little chance to present its side. Henry Wirz was convicted on October 31, 1865 and executed by hanging on November 10. In the February following the Wirz execution, the *New York Tribune* published the Atwater report, so that the general public could be made aware of the men who died at Andersonville. The publication of the list came about after months of disagreement between Atwater and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. These disagreements led to Atwater being arrested and court-martialed for theft. Atwater spent several months in a New York penitentiary in the fall of 1865, after he had returned from Andersonville, where he had helped Clara Barton identify the graves of the dead.⁵ George Washington Steenrod was not among the many men on the list, but his cousin, several friends and fellow regiment members were part of the list.

In 1866, with the war over and the country attempting to unite and fix their differences, George and Louisa were facing the new challenges of married life. In mid-July, George's maternal Grandfather Chester Scott passed away. Family grief was tempered by the welcoming of George and Louisa's first child. On August 25, 1866, Charles C. Steenrod was born in Friendship. He was given the name of his uncle, the brother George had lost to the war at the Battle of the Wilderness. Just a little over a year later, on September 30, 1867, George and Louisa welcomed their only daughter, Anna May Steenrod.⁶

There is little information about George during this time, other than the births of his children. The 1870 Allegany County federal census gives the only clues as to where

the family lived and what George did to support his family. In the census, George and Louisa were living with their 4 year-old son and 2 year-old daughter in a dwelling next to his parents home in Friendship Township. George and his father, Washington, were both farming, while Louisa kept the couple's home. In this census George reported a real estate value of \$1100, and a personal property value of \$700.⁷

The couple was from all indications living a nice life in the township they were both born in and had lived in their entire lives, except for the time that George was away fighting in the war. However, George Steenrod was apparently ready to take part in the continuing growth of the country. George made the difficult decision to move his family from the only home he had never known to a new state and region.

Several factors were at work in George's important and difficult decision to leave Allegany County, New York. The fascination with moving west, and helping to settle new areas, was a passion that helped to establish America's boundaries from coast to coast. In the years before the Civil War the movement west was accomplished by following foot trails, such as the Oregon, Santa Fe and many others. These trails were not for the faint of heart, and many travelers failed, but many more succeeded in their quest to settle new land. Motivation for the move west came in many different forms: escaping the past, escaping some form of persecution, the need to expand the country, or the need to just go and tempt fate. These motivations had pushed thousands west, before the guns were fired at Fort Sumter. The push of white settlers into the Kansas and Nebraska territories, and the competition to make them either Free or slave states, was one of the factors causing the Civil War. However, while the Civil War raged in the East, western migration slowed, but the years following the war would open a floodgate of new

movement. It was this movement that drew George Steenrod into making the decision to move his family thousands of miles from New York.

While George was fighting illness and Rebel soldiers in 1862, President Lincoln signed into law the Homestead Act of 1862. This much anticipated and desired act, helped to open the land in the American West. The act authorized “any citizen or intended citizen [age 21 or over] to select any surveyed land up to 160 acres and to gain title to it after five years’ residence, making prescribed improvements, and paying a modest fee for the service of the register and the receiver.”⁸ The Homestead Act saw several modifications in the years after 1862, including a provision that allowed Union veterans to “use up to four years of their military service to reduce the residence required to make final proof on their land.”⁹ This provision would make it easier for George Steenrod to establish and farm homestead land.

However, unlike the grandparents that had traveled by horse and wagon to Western New York, George and his family would make the trip by railroad. The railroad system had begun to spread westward by the late 1850’s. While there were any number of railroads laying track across the West, the one that gained the most attention was the Union Pacific. In 1862, President Lincoln signed a bill that gave federal aid to build a transcontinental railroad. It would be 1869 before the Union Pacific line joined with the Central Pacific line and formed a rail line that stretched from coast to coast.¹⁰ The Golden Spike that united the two lines was inscribed: “May God continue the unity of our Country as this Railroad united the two great Oceans of the World.”¹¹ For a country that had just come through a terrible Civil War, these words seemed to express the

possibilities of the future. And the railroad, along with the Homestead Act, gave many people the opportunity to explore the future in a new state.

George Steenrod's reasons for deciding to leave New York in May 1872 may have been simple or complicated. There is no indication that he was running from something, or that he had any pressing need to leave the state. He and his wife made the decision to leave both their families, and settle in the state of Kansas, then barely a decade old. George may have selected Kansas for several reasons. The first of these is that as far back as the 1850's people from Allegany County had been settling in the territory of Kansas. It was these individuals who sent letters back to Allegany County to share with former community members the happenings in Kansas before the Civil War. Influenced by the letters at an early age, George may have had a desire to explore this area of the country. George was also influenced by the travel he and the 85th NYVI had experienced in the Civil War. He and other members of the regiment had seen little of the country outside of New York before the war, but while serving in the army they had traveled the coastline of the East. This gave many of them the added advantage of seeing and learning about other regions of the United States.

Since there are no records to indicate how George brought his family to Kansas, one can only speculate on the various possibilities. In May of 1872, George, Louisa and their two children started their journey from Friendship, New York to Sedgwick County, Kansas.¹² George Steenrod had been a young boy when the railroad had made its way to Allegany County, and since that time he had traveled hundreds of mile by rail. In the years since his service in the war, the miles of track had increased greatly and most of these rails had been laid westward. This new method of reaching the West was pushed

and advertised by the railroad companies. It would be the movement of people, not passengers and mail, who would help to make the railroads successful. This meant reaching people all over the world and convincing them to use the railroad to travel west. Which in turn would encourage homes, shops, and the need for freight and the movement of that freight. The railroad would also make money by selling its unused land to the settlers and immigrants.¹³ The “iron horse” would help to push people into the interior, but once they reached their location they were on their own to make this new life work.

While the railroads in the East had been greatly used before the Civil War, the railroad was still new to Kansas. The outbreak of the Civil War had stopped construction on the advancement of the railroads beyond the Missouri River. This would change when Congress chartered the Union and Central Pacific railroads in 1862.¹⁴ Construction on the Union Pacific, Eastern Division (previously known as the Leavenworth, Pawnee and Western Railroad) out of Wyandotte began in September 1863. The line would take several years to build, and the first hundred miles was not finished until November 1864 when it reached Lawrence, Kansas. It took the next two years for the line to reach Topeka, and then Junction City, and one more for it to reach Hays. The Kansas Pacific, as it was known, reached Kit Carson, Colorado in March 1870. Kansas now had a “through railroad.”¹⁵

George and his family were one of many such families that used the railroad as a mode of travel to reach the interior lands of the country. George and Louisa traveled by rail from New York through Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and through the busy railroad center of St. Louis. They would continue from St. Louis to Wyandotte and use the Kansas Pacific to reach Topeka. Once George and his family reached Kansas in May

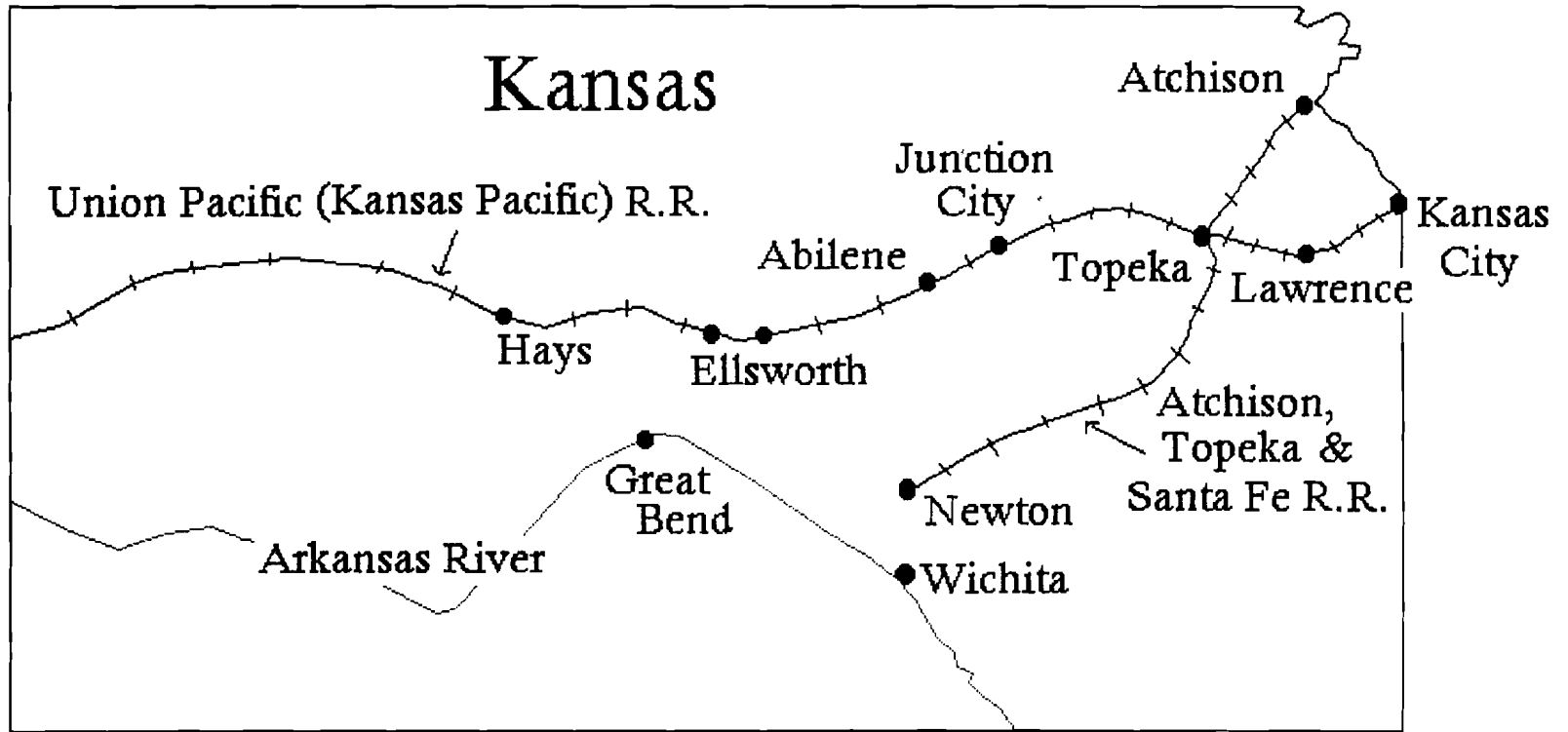
1872, they had the use of several different routes to travel from Topeka to Sedgwick County.(See Figure 17) They may have taken the Kansas Pacific to Junction City and then traveled by wagon to Sedgwick County. They also had the choice to take the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe line to Newton. The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe line had just reached Newton in July 1871.¹⁶ Once George and his family had reached their final railroad destination they would then travel by wagon the rest of the way to their new homestead.

The homestead land that George and Louisa settled on in May 1872 was located in Union Township in Sedgwick County, Kansas.(See Figure 18) The 160 acres of land was part of the federal-land grants that could be acquired under the 1862 Homestead Act. George Steenrod, over twenty-one, head of a household, and a Union Civil War Veteran fit the requirements for the Homestead Act. George and Louise decided to make their home on land in the North East Quarter of Section 20, Township 26, Range 2W.¹⁷ In other words, they settled on 160 acres of land that was located in the then unorganized township of Union, Sedgwick County, Kansas. George filed his land claim at the Wichita Land office, which had been established in March 1872.

Sedgwick County, Kansas had been organized as a county in 1870 and Wichita was designated as its county seat. The township that George and Louisa settled in was northwest of the growing county seat, and had its beginnings in 1869. Township 26, in the federal-township and range system, had begun to see heavy settlement in 1869, 1870 and 1871. The township continued to have settlement opportunity until the fall of 1872, when little of the land was left unclaimed. The organizing of the township came in July 1872. A settler by the name of E.A. Dorsey helped to push the organization of the

Figure 17.

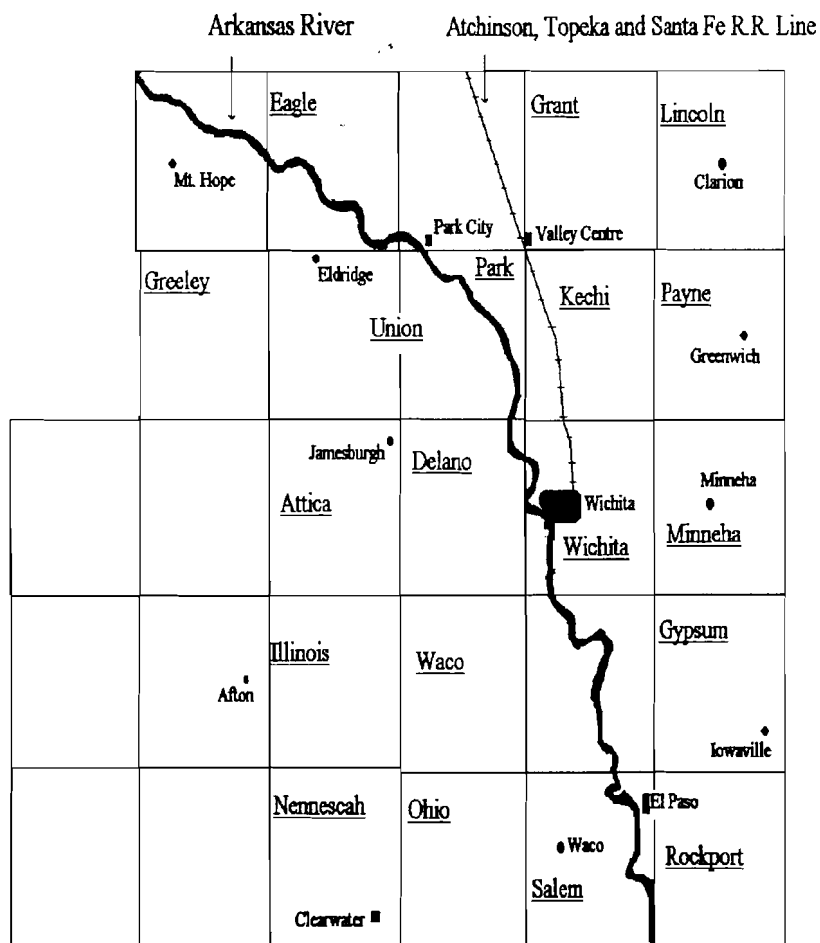
Kansas railroads in 1872



When George and his family arrived from New York.

Figure 18.

1874 Map of Sedgwick County



township, with help from six Civil War veterans. The veterans had come to the township in 1870, while on a trip to hunt buffalo. Finding that they liked what they saw, six of them filed land claims, while a seventh continued west to hunt for buffalo. These men, along with Dorsey, helped to organize the county and decided to name the county in honor of the cause they had served.¹⁸

In the spring of 1872, George Steenrod selected a piece of homestead land. The land he selected had a branch of the Cowskin creek running through the middle of the 160 acres. George had chosen the northeast quarter of Section 20, and the other three quarters of the section were claimed or would be claimed by the end of the year. E. A. Dorsey, the same man who helped to organize the township, claimed the southeast quarter; J. C. Post claimed the southwest quarter; and T.F. Axtell, the older brother of George's wife Louisa, claimed the northwest quarter.¹⁹ It is not known whether Theodore (T.F.) Axtell came to Kansas before George and Louisa, or if he came with them from New York. Land Records show that George's land claim is dated January 1, 1875, and his claim was filed on January 2, 1877. Theodore Axtell's land claim is dated December 15, 1874, but was not filed until April 12, 1883.²⁰

The first few years of the Steenrod's life in Kansas were filled with both ups and downs. George began the farming of his land in the summer and fall of 1872. He built a house on the land, but because the railroad stopped at Newton, he was forced to haul the lumber from that town.²¹ In the first few years, George, like many other Kansas farmers, grew winter wheat and corn on his farm. George also began an orchard on the land, and was able to purchase livestock, including a milch cow, horses, and swine.²²

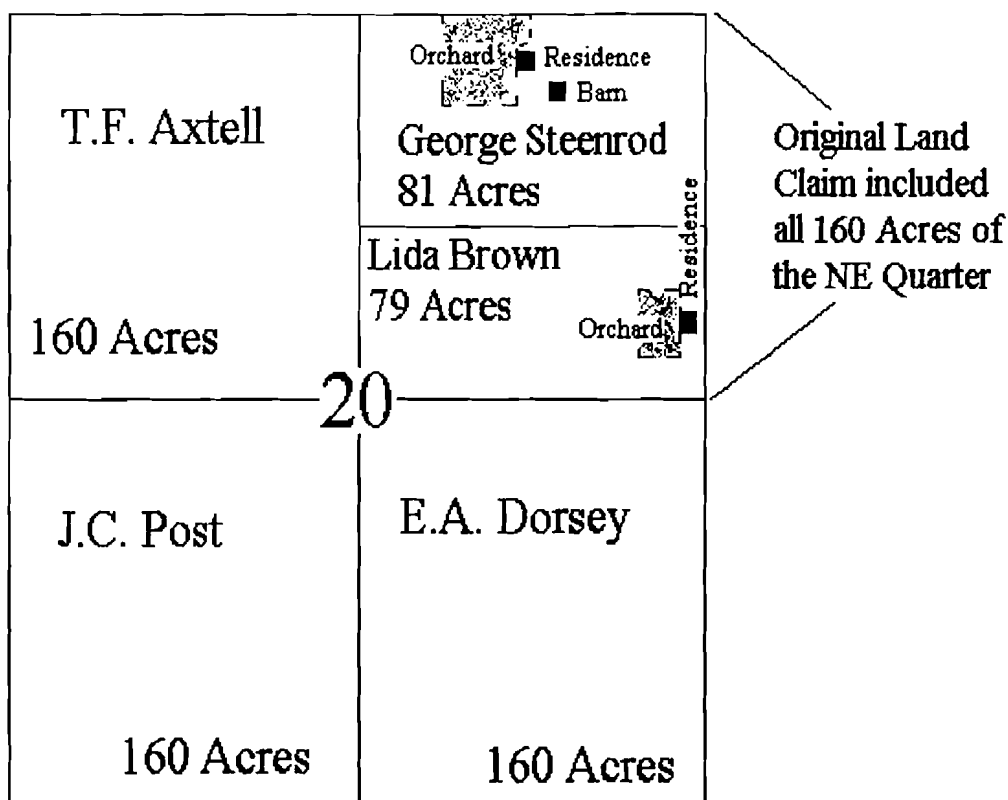
1873 marked a year of national depression for the entire nation, and it was hoped that 1874 would bring better things. But, while 1874 brought joy in the form of his third child and second son, Floyd L. Steenrod, born on March 29, George suffered his only crop failure.²³ This failure was due to the grasshopper invasion of late July and early August. The settlers of Kansas did not take this invasion without a fight. After beating the grasshoppers with sticks and boards they raked them into piles and doused them with kerosene, which was then lit on fire.²⁴

In 1874, George and Louisa not only celebrated the birth of a child, but also the reunion of George with his younger sister, Lida. Lida, along with her husband, Milford Brown, came to Kansas in 1874 and purchased 79 of George's 160 acres. George and Louisa sold the southern portion of their land to Lida Brown in November 1874, for the amount of \$200.²⁵ Milford and Lida Brown were a young couple, both under the age of twenty-five, who had left their homes in New York to come to Kansas. Milford and Lida built a residence on their own land, but helped to farm George Steenrod's farm and orchard.(See Figure 19)

In 1875, the state of Kansas authorized its second statewide census. George and Louisa, along with their three children, were the first entry recorded on the Union Township, Sedgwick County census return. The federal government had been using census reports since 1790, but these returns were limited in their scope. It was not until 1850, that the census included all members of the family, not just head of household. The state of Kansas returns not only listed all individuals in a household, but also contained agricultural reports for individuals. George Steenrod's census entry indicates that the Steenrod family was doing quite well in 1875. George reported that he had sown

Figure 19.

Section 20 of Union Township



1882 Plat Map

40 acres of winter wheat and 40 acres of corn in the fall of 1874. George had also planted ten acres of oats and a half-acre of Irish potatoes and another half-acre of sweet potatoes. The family had been able to produce 50 pounds of butter in the past year, thanks to their two milch cows. In addition to the 2 milch cows, the farm was supporting two horses, six swine, and 1 mule or ass. George had also made an orchard on the homestead land.²⁶

George and Louisa Steenrod had traveled thousands of miles to Kansas, bringing with them their two small children. In the three years since that time they had welcomed a new son, and they had reunited with George's younger sister. They had survived the grasshopper summer of 1874 and were slowly making a success of their farm. The remaining years of the 1870's were relatively quiet years for George and his family. On January 2, 1877 the patent for George and Louisa's land was officially filed with the Register of Deeds of Sedgwick County.²⁷ Six months later, on June 30, 1877, George and Louisa welcomed their youngest child, and third son, Leroy Orrin Steenrod.²⁸ George's oldest two children, Charles and Anna May, attended a nearby school, and their two younger brothers would eventually attend a Union Township school.

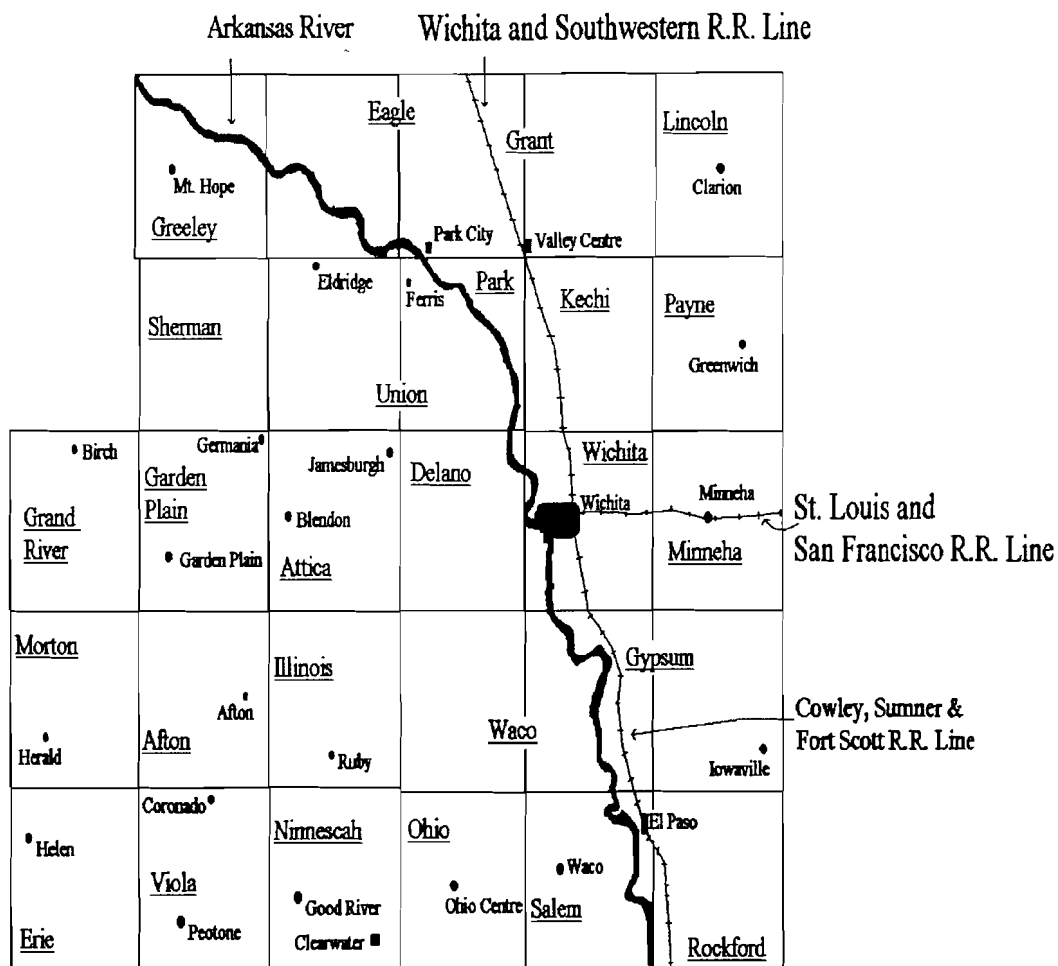
George and Louisa Steenrod were part of the biggest settlement movement the state of Kansas experienced and they had left the most populated state in the country for one of the least populated. In 1870 the population of New York state was 4,382,759, compared to a Kansas population of 364,399. The difference in population is also seen in a comparison of Allegany County and Sedgwick County. In 1870 the population of Allegany County was 40,184, compared to a population of 1,095 in Sedgwick County. In startling contrast to these numbers are the 1880 population figures. The state of Kansas'

population went from 364,399 in 1870 to 996,096 in 1880. By the time that the 1880 Federal population census was conducted, the population in Sedgwick County had increased by 17,500 people.²⁹ The increase in population brought the demand for expanded railroads, not just through major cities, but through smaller towns. It would be the railroad that helped to either break or make the small towns in the West. The introduction of a railroad to a town in the West helped to bring new people and products to the town. The lack of a railroad in a town would encourage people to move to towns with railroads and cause settlers to locate in towns with railroads. The 1880's brought the railroad through Union township and the consequences brought change for the Steenrod family.

The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad had been extended from Newton to Wichita by 1874, and the name changed to the Wichita and SouthWest Railway by 1880. Sedgwick County gained two more lines by 1880, the St. Louis and San Francisco line ran east to Wichita, and the Cowley, Sumner and Fort Smith line ran south from Wichita.³⁰ (See Figure 20) The county continued to have additional lines added throughout the first five years of the 1880's. In 1883 the people of Union township believed they had a chance to capture a railroad line, but these hopes would prove to be false. Colonel J.W. Hartzell promoted the idea of a line running from Wichita to McPherson, and financial bonds were voted in Union, Delano, and Park Townships, along with Haven Township in Reno County.³¹ The citizens in Union township were so sure that they would get the line that they selected a name and an area for a new town. Land owners of the western side of section 13, William Williams (northwest quarter) and Henry Haskins (southwest quarter), went so far as to put a few acres of their cornfields

Figure 20.

1880 Map of Sedgwick County



into a town site. The townsite had two streets laid out, along with several buildings erected and was even granted a post office on June 20, 1884. However, the promoter of the rail line proved to be just that, a promoter. The line was never granted and the small town of Hatfield would struggle to survive. The town eventually lost its post office in 1886, and faded into oblivion.³²

While the railroad was a concern for all the citizens of Union, George and Louisa Steenrod had other problems to contend with in 1884 and 1885. On January 30, 1884, George's sister Lida sold her 79 acres of the Steenrod land claim to Alfred and Sarah Woods. Lida and her husband, Milford Brown, along with their young daughter Allie, left Kansas and returned to Allegany County in New York. The Woods would not stay on the land long, and in March 1885, George bought back the land that Lida sold to the Woods. George purchased the 79 acres of land for \$2,000, paying \$600 up front and paying the other \$1400 in two mortgage payments during 1885.³³

1885 also brought about another state census that lists George and Louisa living in their farm house with their three youngest children, Anna May, Floyd, and Leroy. The agricultural report for the Steenrod farm shows that the farm was successful. George had sown 35 acres of winter wheat in the fall of 1864. In the spring of 1885, he had also sown 60 acres of corn, 8 acres of oats and one acre of Irish potatoes. The farm was supporting seven horses, four milch cows, eight other types of cattle, and 86 swine. The family continued to make butter, and in the year ending on March 1, 1885, they had made 400 pounds. The farm was also supported by \$700 worth of animals fattened and slaughtered or sold for slaughter during the year. The family's orchard was also producing, and there were 50 Apple, 300 Peach, and 40 Cherry trees in bearing.³⁴ George

had become a successful farmer and 1885 would also show him to be a successful town founder.

1884 had marked the twentieth anniversary of George Steenrod's imprisonment in Andersonville during the Civil War. His life had seen great change since that time, his marriage, his children and his move to Kansas were a few of the milestones that marked the change. George's parents were still alive, as was Louisa's mother, and it is known that Washington Steenrod made several trips to Kansas. George's own family was thriving, and while his three younger children were still at home, his oldest, Charles, was attempting to make his own way in life. The years had taken hard work and fortitude, but George and his family had made their farm a success. The months he spent at Andersonville did not completely disappear for George, and the state census would periodically remind him of the time he spent in the prison. The census required that veterans note the Civil War prisons they had been held in during the war. For George the answer was always the same, Andersonville, Charleston and Florence.³⁵ The years had erased some memories, and others had been replaced by twenty more years of living. However, George Steenrod was not content with just his successful farm, he was ready to take on a new challenge and 1885 would prove the year to do just that.

Chapter 9 ❖ Colwich and Retirement

The desire for a railroad in Union Township did not die when the proposed railroad fell through in 1884. The northwestern townships in Sedgwick county still wanted a railroad to pass through their towns, and important men in Wichita wanted to build that railroad. Four Wichita businessmen, known as the “Big 4”, worked to organize a railroad line that would run from Wichita to the Colorado state line. These four men, M.M. Murdock, N.F. Neiderlander, M.W. Levy, and A.W. Oliver, were able to successfully propose the line to the Missouri Pacific. However, the original plan to make Hatfield the Union Township depot did not please two influential leaders in the township.¹

The two men, Charles F. Hyde, an 1872 settler of Union Township, and George Steenrod, wanted a town closer to their own farms. The two men, along with Wichita businessman, Kos Harris, were able to use their influence to block the proposed line, unless they could be assured the new train station would be changed from Hatfield to a town closer to the center of the township.² Once this was assured, the plans were set in motion for a new rail line to be laid through Union Township.

The new line would make it necessary for towns or stations to be laid out a distance of six miles apart. In order for these new towns to be established, three of the “Big 4,” along with Kos Harris and J.W. Miller of Fort Scott established The Eagle Townsite Company. This company would lay out the towns along the Wichita and Colorado line of the Missouri Pacific. On September 1, the company purchased the southeast quarter of section 16 in Union Township for \$6000 from landowner Theodore Bachmeister. Two months later, on November 9, the company granted the right of way

to the Wichita and Colorado Railway. The following day, the company sold the section of land for \$1500 to the Union City Town Company. The directors of the Union City Town Company included Neiderlander, Harris, N.S. Woods, L.D. Skinner, all of Wichita, and Hatfield residents Henry Haskins and Dan Boone.³ The townsite was “platted on a prairie soil amidst a broad expanse of level prairie. The site was considered advantageous because of the fertile soil, the people who lived in the area and the connection with Wichita.”⁴

The city of Colwich was named for the Wichita and Colorado Railway because without the railroad it would not exist. The question of who came up with that name is something of a mystery. At the first town meeting, held at George Steenrod’s farm, the name was selected, but there are three possible explanations for the name. The first is that the town founders decided on the name by taking the first few letters of the railway names.⁵ Charles Hyde, one of the town founders, claims that he came up with the name.⁶ The third explanation comes from the Steenrod family. This theory is that two of the town founders, Kos Harris and N.F. Neiderlander, asked Louisa Steenrod to give the town a name. The two men suggested that she give the town her own name, but Louisa felt that a woman’s name was not appropriate and suggested the name Colwich.⁷ In any case, the vote for the new name was unanimous and the town was designated as Colwich.

The town was platted and the man given the responsibility of selling the land was George Steenrod. This put George, now 40, in the business of Real Estate, Loans and Insurance. On November 20, George began to sell the town land for prices ranging from \$75 to \$130 and was selling six to ten lots daily.⁸ Colwich quickly grew and by December 4, the new town had seven buildings. These buildings included a general store

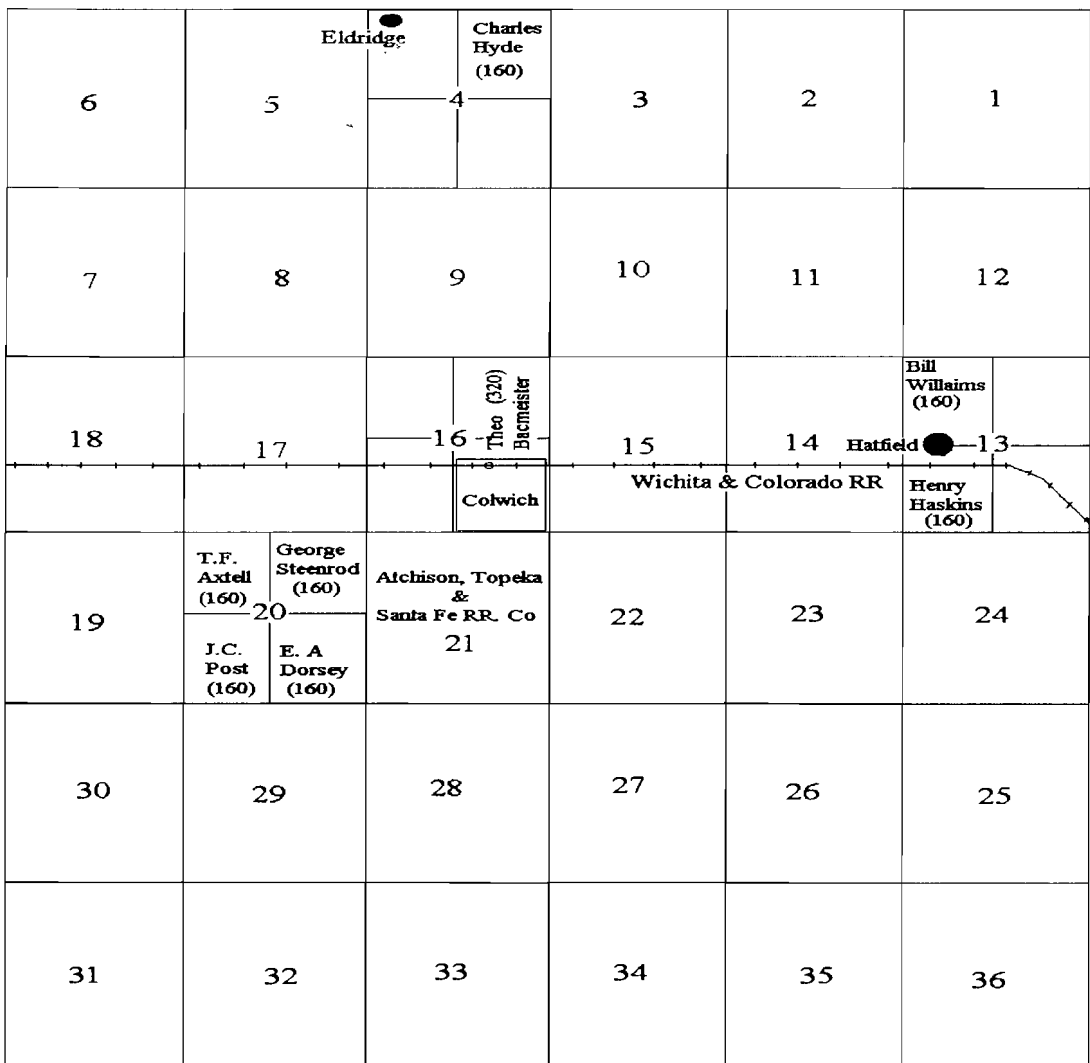
and post office that had been moved from the Union town of Eldridge. The Hatfield hardware store and Daniel Boone building had been moved to Colwich and turned into the Eagle Hotel and drug store, respectively. The town was granted a post office on December 18 by the Office of the Post Master General, with Henry Haskins, who had been the postmaster at Hatfield, becoming the postmaster at Colwich.⁹

The town continued to grow and by January 1, 1886 150 town lots had sold. The town grew in size with the Breese addition in March, the Crocker addition in April, and the Eagle townsite addition in August. The town grew to thirty buildings, twenty-one families, fifteen dwellings, a school district, and a saloon. The town of Colwich was incorporated without difficulty on June 6, 1887.¹⁰ The town had seen its growth increase due to the finished railroad line of the Wichita and Colorado Railway. The first train arrived from Wichita on February 15, 1886.¹¹ (See Figure 21)

George Steenrod was one of several men who helped put Colwich, Kansas on the map. George, who was by the end of the 1880's unable to do hard manual labor, had taken on the job of real estate agent for the new town. George had been suffering from rheumatism and other maladies throughout the years that he had worked his farm. Affidavits, taken because of George's request of a war pension, show that George was unable to perform manual labor. These general affidavits were taken from two of George's Colwich neighbors and his brother-in-law, Milford Brown.¹² James Barnett's affidavit states that George "was unable to at any time from his discharge to 1872 to perform more than one half the labor of an able bodied man, and since 1885 has been unable to perform hard manual labor at all."¹³ Because of George's growing inability to

Figure 21.

Union Township with Important citizens, towns of Colwich and Hatfield and Wichita & Colorado Railroad



Numbered Sections of the Federal Township and Range System

do the labor that farming required, he and Louisa purchased a lot in the city of Colwich. The Steenrod home was one of the first homes in the new town of Colwich. While George and Louisa were settling into their new home and town, an event occurred that shattered the peace of George and Louisa Steenrods life.



Figure 22.
George Steenrod Home sometime in the 1880's
Photo taken from Colwich Community Pictorial History

In the spring of 1886, George's son, Charles, took a job at a real estate office in the Kansas City Courthouse. Charles was making up deeds in his office on May 10, when a tornado descended upon the courthouse. The courthouse, along with a nearby school, was destroyed during the storm.¹⁴ Charles, who was standing in a doorway, was struck by a flying brick and hit with falling walls. He suffered internal injuries, but was still alive, when his parents were told of the news. George traveled to Wichita where he boarded a train for Kansas City to go to his son. George arrived in time to speak to his son, and it seemed that Charles would recover from his injuries. However, Charles' internal injuries proved too much and he began to slowly grow weaker over the coming week. George telegraphed this news back to his wife, who had gone to Colwich to await word of her son's condition. Louisa left for Wichita and then Kansas City, where she hoped to join her husband at their sons bedside. On May 17, while Louisa was making the trip to Kansas City, Charles' internal injuries proved too much and he died, before his mother made it to his side. On the evening of May 18, George and Louisa accompanied the body of their son back to Wichita by train. On the morning of March 19, the body of Charles Steenrod was escorted by the honor guard of Company A, 2nd Regiment, Kansas

National Guard, to the Steenrod farm. Charles had been a member of the company and many of the young men escorting his body had been friends. Nineteen-year-old Charles Steenrod, the oldest son of George and Louisa and the namesake of the brother George lost in the war, was buried in the Eldridge Cemetery in Union Township. The funeral was one of the largest the county had seen in its history and George and Louisa expressed their thanks to the community in a small notice in the May 20 issue of *The Wichita Daily Eagle*.¹⁵

The death of their son must have seemed to be a senseless and unexplainable act of nature. In his forty years, George Steenrod had experienced death in numerous ways, but this death was every parent's nightmare. George and Louisa, like many other parents, had no choice but to continue their lives and focus on their other three children. George and Louisa moved to the city of Colwich sometime in mid to late 1886. George kept the farm, but hired other individuals to work it for him. The late 1880's brought a new challenge for George in the form of general store. George and another New York native, Perry Allen, operated the Steenrod and Allen General Merchandise Store.¹⁶ George was also venturing into the political arena in the late 1880's. In the city election of June 1887, in which ten women voted due to the change in law allowing women to vote in municipal elections, George Steenrod was elected mayor. George's political experience had come from being a three term county commissioner in the early 1880's and a Justice of the Peace for two terms.¹⁷

George and Louisa settled into a period of living a simple country life. They were one of the first families to reside in the new town of Colwich and they watched as it built up around them. In the summer of 1886 The Commercial Hotel opened, and it competed

against the Eagle House for visitors to the town. The Bank of Colwich certificate of organization was filed on February 23, 1886, and was housed in the first permanent brick structure in the town. The bank was reorganized in 1891 to become The State Bank of Colwich. The town also became home to The Wichita and Colwich Calorific Pressed Brick Company in March 1887. This brick company produced 36,000 bricks a day and at its height it shipped three boxcars full of bricks a day to Hutchinson.¹⁸ The small town was unable to produce a paper for the long term, but there were three different attempts at the process. *The Colwich Rambler* lasted just a month in 1887. *The Colwich Courier* ran the longest from April 1887 to December 1892. *The Sedgwick County Reporter* was also short lived and ran only from January 1893 to June 1893.¹⁹

A different type of successful business in Colwich was the ever-popular saloon. Saloons existed in most Kansas towns. Two saloons were open in Colwich by March 1886, but both had been closed by April of that year. The saloons, which many believed encouraged drinking, did not go away, and by November the saloons were back in business. The city council of Colwich decided to take care of the saloon problem in June 1887. The council passed ordinance No. 5, which prohibited drinking in Colwich, and the saloons were closed on July 14. The town would continue to fight the saloon problem, with the city council fining the owners of the saloon. The money collected from the saloon owners was used to pay for the first sidewalk in the city of Colwich. In 1888, the town had a population between 300 and 350 and had grown to include a stockyard and a jail. The town also had its first street lamp in front of the Steenrod and Allen General Store. These years were the boom of Colwich, and the town boom began to slow in the waning year of the 1880's and early 1890's.²⁰ Sedgwick County continued

its growth and by 1888 the county had several different railroad lines that covered the county in all directions. (See Figure 23)

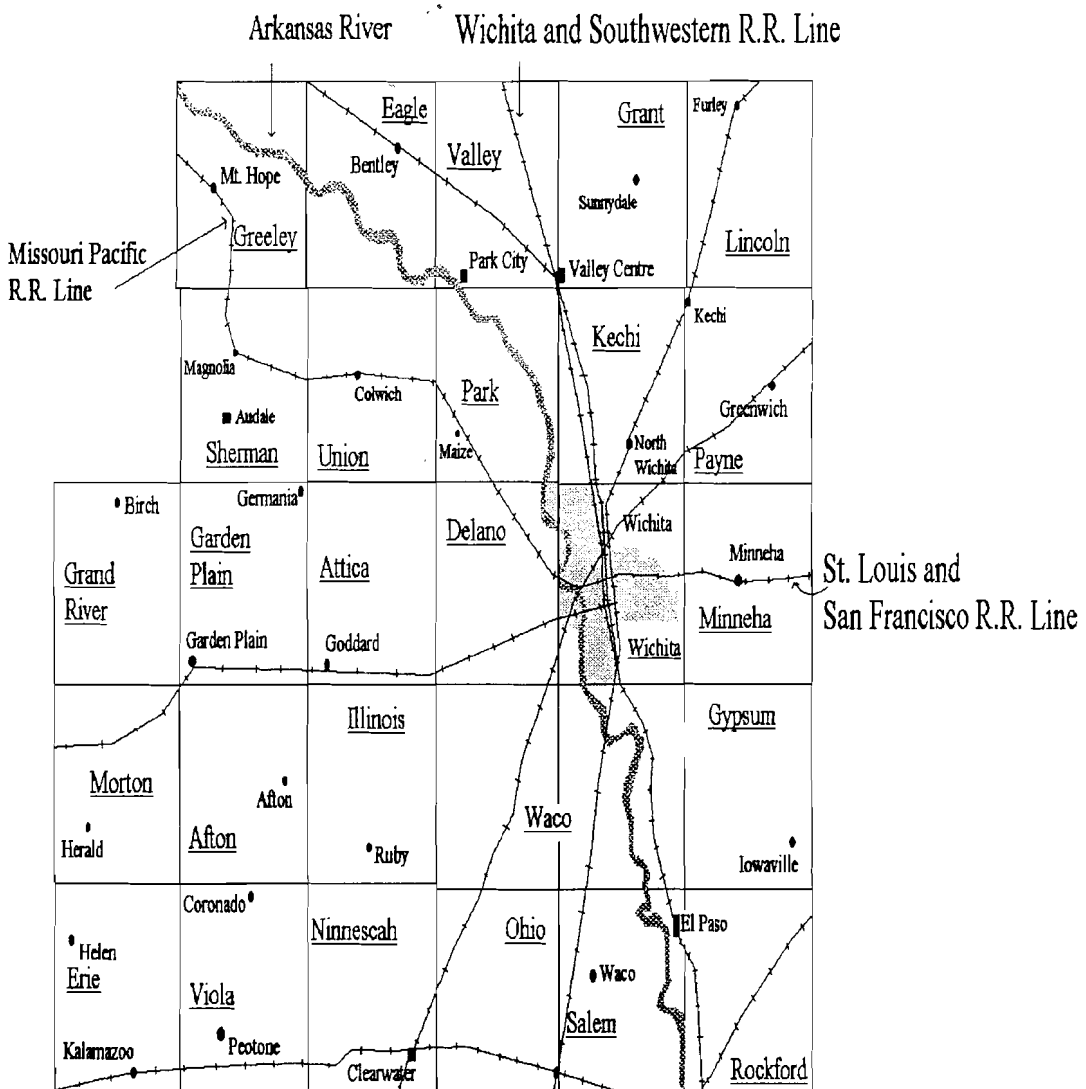
George and Louisa lived in their home with their three children until 1889. On April 2, 1889, twenty-four years to the day her parents married, Anna May Steenrod married Alexander Williams.²¹ In an ironic twist of fate, Alexander Williams was the son of the man who had plowed part of his cornfield under so the town of Hatfield could be raised, a plan defeated by Alex's future father-in-law. Anna's husband Alex had been born in Batavia, New York and came with his parents, William and Ellen Newton Williams, to Kansas in 1880. Alex's parents were both from counties in New York that are located north of the Steenrod's own Allegany County.²² The young couple made their new home on a farm between Colwich and Maize.²³

In early October 1889, *The Colwich Courier* reported that George's father Washington visited Colwich, and enjoyed his visit to the city. Three months after his father's visit, George made the decision to sell his homestead land to the Bank of Colwich.²⁴ With the family now settled in the town of Colwich, George continued to work in the general store and began working as a grain buyer. George and Louisa became grandparents in November 1891 when daughter Anna May gave birth to Angenette Williams in Colwich. The joy of becoming grandparents was tempered by the grief at George's mother, Lydia Steenrod's death the following year in Friendship, New York.²⁵

Sometime before 1895, George and Louisa made the decision to have Louisa's mother, Louisa Higgins, move in with the family at the Colwich house. Louisa Axtell had remarried in the 1860's. Her husband was a farmer who was twenty-four years her

Figure 23.

1888 Map of Sedgwick County



senior. In 1870 Louisa and her husband, Wright Higgins, were living in a home next to George's maternal uncle, Chester Scott, Jr. Louisa Higgins had been widowed a second time while living in New York and came from New York to live with her daughter and son-in-law.²⁶ George and Louisa's extended family continued to grow, and in June 1894, Romeyn S. Williams was born to Alex and Anna Williams in Colwich.²⁷

At the time of the 1895 census, George and Louisa had their youngest son Leroy and Louisa's mother living with them. The couple were also housing two boarders, a young woman and her three-year-old son, at their house in Colwich. George did not leave his farming roots behind when the family moved to Colwich in 1886. He and Louisa purchased a lot large enough to allow George to cultivate 2 acres. By 1895

George had constructed a barn, water tank, and a windmill on the property. The 1895

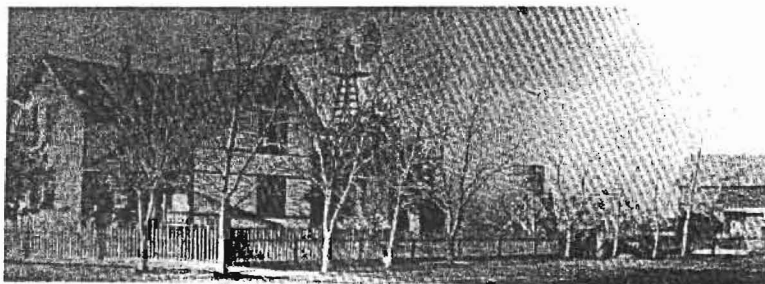


Figure 24. George Steenrod Home in Colwich During the 1890's.

census shows that while

George left the planting and harvesting of major crops like winter wheat, corn and oats to others, he still took the time to plant an orchard. In 1895, George had ten Apple, Pear, and Peach trees in bearing, along with twelve Cherry trees in bearing. George had fifteen Apple, ten Pear, three Peach, and twelve Plum trees not in bearing. George continued to keep livestock at his home in Colwich and in 1895 he had a milch cow and seven swine.²⁸

George left the general store business by 1891, and his partner Perry Allen took over the store. George was working as a grain buyer at the time of the 1895 census and spent the years following working in the same job. The years following the 1895 census

passed quietly for the Steenrods in Colwich. George's father Washington Steenrod passed away in the fall of 1899, at the age of 82, in the same town where he lived his entire life, Friendship, New York. Washington was laid to rest beside his wife Lydia in the Maple Grove Cemetery in that same town.²⁹

During the late 1890's, George's youngest son, Leroy, taught school for School District No. 75, which was located in section 7 of the township. Leroy was also a member of a popular baseball club in Colwich. As early as 1887, Colwich was supporting a baseball team and had constructed a diamond west of the town. Leroy married Carrie A. Brown, the daughter of another Union Township settler, in June 1900.³⁰

George and Louisa, who were both in their fifties, had hired a servant to take care of their home by the time of the 1900 census. In the years that followed, they would have several different female servants, including a housekeeper who would be with them for over ten years and make the move to Wichita with them. George and Louisa spent the early 1900's at their home in Colwich. George continued to work as a grain buyer and became a coal dealer as well. They continued to take in boarders, and, by 1910, the couple had Colwich's physician, William Walker, residing with them.³¹ The 1900's also brought the joy of three additional grandchildren. Leroy and his wife had both a son and a daughter, and Floyd and his wife, Frances, had a daughter.³²

George spent the years from 1910 to 1915 working as an insurance salesman in Colwich. George also applied for and received a service pension from the United States Government. In 1916, George and Louisa made the decision to retire to a house in Wichita. Anna and Alex Williams had moved their family to Wichita in the early part of

the century and George and Louisa's youngest son, Leroy, was also in Wichita.³³ The Colwich population had suffered in the years following its boom and by 1900 had dropped to just 250 people. George and Louisa made the move to Wichita in 1916, where they purchased a home at 115 South Green Avenue.³⁴ George and Louisa spent their remaining years at this house in Wichita. They welcomed their first great-grandchild in 1917, when their grandson, Romeyn Williams and his wife Mildred, became the parents of May Jeanette Williams.³⁵ The couple were still active and in November 1919, George Steenrod became a member of the Sedgwick County Pioneer Society, an organization that was formed in February 1919 for the express purpose of recognizing the members of the community that had helped to settle Sedgwick County.³⁶ By 1918, George's health had begun to suffer and he remained ill for two years. The man who had survived four years of war, including a year at Andersonville, died on the afternoon of September 7, 1920, at the age of 75. George Washington Steenrod's funeral services took place at his Wichita home on September 9 and he was laid to rest at the Maple



Figure 25.
George W. Steenrod

Grove Cemetery in Wichita.³⁷

Louisa Steenrod remained at the home she shared with her husband in Wichita with her daughter and son-in-law. She lived eight years longer than her husband, and died after a brief illness on January 9, 1928, at the age of 81. She was buried alongside her husband at Maple Grove Cemetery.³⁸



Figure 26.
Louisa Axtell Steenrod

The Steenrod gravestone marker at the Maple Grove Cemetery is a large square rock stone with the name STEENROD engraved into it. It is unique in that the name Steenrod appears on one side, and another family name appears on the other side. The reasons for the shared marker are unknown. Anna and Alex Williams were also buried with the Steenrods in the Maple Grove Cemetery, Alex in 1934 and Anna in 1937.³⁹

The American Flag that is placed on his grave every Memorial Day commemorates George Steenrod's contribution to the Union cause. It seems a small tribute to the man who gave four years to the Union cause and four months spent in the Andersonville prison. He is only one of many Andersonville survivors who is listed in the Andersonville database as still living at the time of 50th anniversary of the prison in 1914.⁴⁰ George Washington Steenrod's life was changed by the Civil War and the time that he spent at the Andersonville Prison Camp. The years before the war had been filled with his parents and his siblings, and the years after were filled with his marriage and children. George Washington Steenrod did not allow the Civil War or Andersonville to stop him from making a happy and successful life.

Conclusion

While visiting the Andersonville National Cemetery and looking at the row upon row of graves several questions occurred to me. What if George had died at this prison? What if he had succumbed to one of the many diseases, or what if he had stepped over the deadline and a guard had killed him? Why did George live, when so many others, including his cousin had died? Why did George survive four years of service, including imprisonment at Andersonville, but not Charles Steenrod? Charles served three months before being killed at the Battle of the Wilderness. And then there is the more philosophical, did George earn his survival, did he use his survival as a gift or a crutch.

George Steenrod did not change the world, or perform great miracles. He was a simple farmer who took the opportunity afforded him by the United States government and moved his family west. He was married for fifty-five years to the same woman, and together they raised four children and helped to form a new community. He saw his share of hard times, but he was also blessed with many great moments. In the overall course of George's seventy-five years the four months he spent at Andersonville seem a small amount of time. But it is this time that has helped to define the life of George Washington Steenrod.

It is impossible to know why George Steenrod is not one of the 13,000 graves at Andersonville. It is impossible to know why George's cousin Chauncey became one of those 13,000 graves at Andersonville. There is no logic to explain who died and who lived in the Civil War. The Andersonville Raiders are a prime example of how the war could make men turn on their fellow soldiers and use any method available to subjugate and destroy the weak. The problems inside Andersonville were only the magnified

problems of society. The prison did not create the Raiders, the war did not create the Raiders, human nature created the Raiders. This does not excuse the actions of the Raiders, nor does it explain why some of the men became Raiders, but so many others did not. The prison evolved into a community and like any community, and it held both good and bad elements.

The Andersonville National Historic Site is marked with state monuments that honor the dead from each state. The monuments run from the simple to the intricately designed. They are large stone structures, and they often have sayings engraved on them that ring with honor, pride and patriotism. These structures are nice to look at and should be taken for what they are, monuments to the men who spent time at the prison. However, it is not the monuments on the prison grounds or the monuments that are in the cemetery that tell the true story of Andersonville. It is the reconstructed stockade walls, and the poles that mark the deadline that that tell the story of Andersonville. It is the one remaining escape tunnel entrance, the earthworks that are still visible, the reconstructed North gate, the shebang and other types of shelters, and the guard towers that tell the story of Andersonville. It is the row upon row of white grave markers that stretch in all directions in the cemetery that tells the story of Andersonville. Perhaps the most important part of the story of Andersonville is not a monument, or a wall, or even a grave. The true story of Andersonville comes from the men who walked out of the prison and had the courage to keep going. They kept going and while many went back to the homes they had left, many left those homes for the west and for a new life. These men and the generations that descended them are the true story of Andersonville.

George Washington Steenrod may not have changed the world, but he changed his small part of it. He is one of many who survived Andersonville, and who retained the diary he kept while at the prison. He was a simple man who made a life for himself, his wife and his children both in New York and in Kansas. However, it is these simple men who helped to settle the West, and helped to establish many of the small towns that are all over state maps.

George Washington Steenrod lived a good life and at the time of his death in 1920 he had a long list of accomplishments. It is safe to say that the dash between the dates on George's gravestone represent a good life and a life filled with courage and fortitude. It is the dash that this thesis represents, and the dash that makes me proud to call this man grandfather.

Notes

Chapter 1 ❖ Allegany Roots

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3. *Ibid.*, 96.
4. *Ibid.*, 272.
5. Personal Family History Information taken from the records of Bruce Harris of El Dorado, Kansas in the Fall of 1993.
6. *History of Allegany County with Illustrations Descriptive of Scenery: 1806-1879* (New York: F.W. Beers and Co., 1879), 272.
7. *Ibid.*, 272
8. *Ibid.*, 96.
9. *Ibid.*, 90.
10. *Ibid.*, 90.
11. *Ibid.*, 96.
12. *Ibid.*, 82.
13. *Ibid.*, 82.
14. *Ibid.*, 85.
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16. *Ibid.*, 84.
17. William and Bruce Catton, *Two Roads to Sumter*. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1963), 125-126.
18. *Ibid.*, 84.
19. *Ibid.*, 84.

Chapter 2 ❖ Farmboy to Citizen Soldier

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14. Ibid., 19.
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16. Mahood, *The Plymouth Pilgrims*, 19.
17. Ibid., 20.
18. Ibid., 22.
19. Ibid., 31.
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21. Ibid., 34-35.
22. Ibid., 35.
23. Ibid., 37.
24. Ibid., 37.
25. Ibid., 37.
26. Ibid., 38.
27. Ibid., 38.
28. Ibid., 39.
29. Ibid., 39.
30. Ibid., 38, 41, and 238.
31. Ibid., 47.
32. Mahood, *The Plymouth Pilgrims*, 50; Frances H. Kennedy, editor and principal contributor, *The Civil War Battlefield Guide, Second Edition* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 88-90.
33. Military Veteran Records of George W. Steenrod, Letter written by Lydia M. Steenrod of Nile, Allegany County, New York to Surgeon General of the United States William A. Hammond on November 30, 1862; Muster Rolls for the 85th New York Volunteer Infantry from September 1861 to June 1865 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.)
34. Frances H. Kennedy, editor and principal contributor, *The Civil War Battlefield Guide, Second Edition* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 90.
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36. Mahood, *The Plymouth Pilgrims*, 65.
37. Ibid., 77.
38. Ibid., 238.
39. Kennedy, 92-97.
40. Mahood, *The Plymouth Pilgrims*, 87-88.
41. Kennedy, 97.
42. Ibid., 98-101.

43. Ibid., 101-104.
44. Mahood, *The Plymouth Pilgrims*, 96. Kennedy, 101.
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6. Mahood, *The Plymouth Pilgrims*, 129.
7. Mahood, *The Plymouth Pilgrims*, 131-132; Kennedy, 194-195.

8. Mahood, *The Plymouth Pilgrims*, 134-135; Kennedy, 195.
9. Mahood, *The Plymouth Pilgrims*, 135-136.
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11. Martin Graham and George Skoch, *Great Battles of the Civil War* (Illinois: Publications International, Ltd., 1989), 36-39.
12. Ibid., 44-47.
13. Ibid., 42.
14. Frank R. Freeman, *Gangrene and Glory: Medical Care during the American Civil War* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickson University Press, 1998), 19, 119, and 232.
15. Mahood, *The Plymouth Pilgrims*, 145-147.
16. Ibid., 147-153.
17. Ibid., 153.

Chapter 4 ❖ “Everything is Lovely and the Goose Hangs High”

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2. George Washington Steenrod: Diary from January 1 to December 2, 1864. Original diary is housed at the Kansas State Historical Society in the manuscript collection, along with a transcript of the diary. Diary is the work of Private George Washington Steenrod, Company C, 85th New York Volunteer Infantry. Observations of the appearance of the diary done on April 3, 2000 by Steenrod’s Great-Great-Great-Granddaughter, Amy Louise Waters, author of thesis.
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18. Adjutant-General Reports for State of New York, *Documents of the Assembly of the State of New York: Annual Report, Vol. VI, No. 13, Part 5* (New York: J.B. Lyon Company Printers, 1902), 1004; *85th New York Volunteer Infantry* [Accessed 11 February 1999], http://snycorva.cortland.edu/~woosterk/genweb/85th_inf.html, internet.

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25. Freemon, 25 and 206.

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27. *Ibid.*, 159.

28. *Ibid.*, 159.

29. *Ibid.*, 162.

30. *Ibid.*, 162-163.

31. *Ibid.*, 165.

32. *Ibid.*, 166.

33. *Ibid.*, 163 and 166.

Chapter 5 ❖ Private Steenrod's Pilgrimage to Hell

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2. *Ibid.*, 171.

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20. Ibid., 194.
21. Mahood, *Charlie Mosher's Civil War*, 206.
22. Mahood, *The Plymouth Pilgrims*, 194-195.
23. *The Civil War "Plymouth Pilgrims"*, [Accessed 2 March 1999] <http://members.aol.com/CWPPDS/pilgrims.html>, internet.
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26. Mahood, *The Plymouth Pilgrims*, 194-195.
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28. Ibid., 195.
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11. Roberts, 48-50.
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14. *Ibid.*, 169.
15. John L. Ransom, *John Ransom's Diary* (New York: Paul S. Eriksson, Inc., 1963), 71.
16. Mahood, *Charlie Mosher's Civil War*, 210.
17. Adjutant-General Report for State of New York, *Documents of the Assembly of the State of New York: Annual Report, Vol. VI, No. 13, Part 5* (New York: J.B. Lyon Company Printers, 1902), 1020.
18. Observations of Andersonville Prison by Amy Louise Waters on June 13, 1999, while on a personal research trip to the prison. The Northeast corner of the prison grounds has a reconstructed stockade with several different types of shelters, including the most common form of shelter, the shebang.
19. Ransom, 71.
20. Roberts, 32.
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23. *Ibid.*, 28.
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26. Roberts, 155.
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29. Adjutant-General Report for State of New York, *Documents of the Assembly of the State of New York: Annual Report, Vol. VI, No. 13, Part 5* (New York: J.B. Lyon Company Printers, 1902), 1101.
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44. Mahood, *Plymouth Pilgrims*, 278; Adjutant-General Report for State of New York, *Documents of the Assembly of the State of New York: Annual Report, Vol. VI, No. 13, Part 5* (New York: J.B. Lyon Company Printers, 1902), 969, 1002, and 1004.
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66. Ibid.

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75. Andersonville Official Reports, Month of August.

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77. Mahood, *Plymouth Pilgrims*, 278.

78. Adjutant-General Report for State of New York, *Documents of the Assembly of the State of New York: Annual Report, Vol. VI, No. 13, Part 5* (New York: J.B. Lyon Company Printers, 1902), 1087; Atwater List, 40.

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Appendix

Lydia Steenrod's Letter to Surgeon General Hammond:

Nile Allegany Co NY Nov 30th 1862

Surgeon General

William A. Hamilton

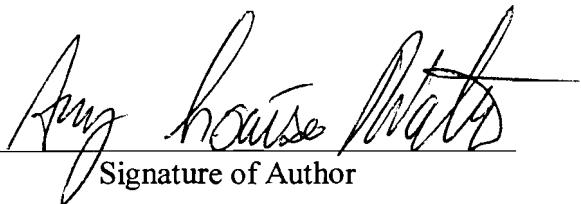
Dear Sir your well known kindness and untiring zeal in behalf of the sick and wounded Soldiers of the Union Army and the justness of my plea in behalf of my son George W. Steenrod a private in Com C 85th Regt New York Volunteer now Stationed at Suffolk Virginia has induced me to solicit your influence in his behalf My son enlisted over one year ago He was then only Sixteen years of age but very large for one of his age he was of (mushroom) growth the 3rd of last December the regt started for Washington and about the first I heard from my son he had made a (breach) a shoveling and was going to be discharged but the surgeon thought perhaps it was a sprain of the muscles and he did not want to be discharged so the doctor done what he could for him but I am informed that he was not entirely cured by a returned soldier how much that has had to do with after Sickness you can judge better than I His regiment went in McLellans army on the Peninsula his regt was stationed for a while at Newport News there he was taken with that scourge of the soldier Diarrhea and has had it ever since when his regt marched to the Siege of Yorktown he was left behind but managed in a few days to crawl along after them and when the Army started in pursuit after the evacuation of Yorktown he was again left with a lot of more sick in Daniel Parker care who has since been Discharged whom I get these particulars from there they managed keep along (Sittle) when the army stopt long enough they would come up and when it started again the would be left behind so they managed until they crossed the Chickahominy his regt was in the battle of May 30th when Caseys Division was Defeated but he was on the sick list and did not take part in the fight nor has he done a days duty since but kept getting poorer and weaker every day when at Harrisons Landing his Surgeon sent him down to the transport to go North but a surgeon at the Landing told him to go back and he would get a discharge for him so he was taken back and that was the last of his discharge If he had come North he would have been discharged long ere this after the retreat of McLellans Army back the 85th was left at Newport News and there he seemed to be getting better for awhile but was taken worse then ever and he was reduced to a skeleton Two months ago they was ordered to Suffolk and he was sent to the Regimental Hospital where he now remains is still alive after being in the Hospital awhile he seemed to be slowly getting better there but he was very depressed but he soon had another attack of his old complains which put clear back again and as soon as he began to mend again he was attacked with violent Dysentery and Piles he was worse than ever but I learn that he was some better at last accounts we heard of him his comrades are very indignant at their surgeon because he is not discharged This surgeons address is William Smith 85th Regt NYSV Suffolk Virginia Pecks Division 3rd Brigade We get letters almost daily and have for the last three months saying if he was not got home he would soon die but what can I do I have Written to

Doctor Smith about six weeks ago I wrote to him asking him to use his influence to procuring my sons discharge he answered me that my son was some better and should have the best care his ability and circumstance would admit but did not give me any encouragement that he would give him a Certificate of Disability in any case if you want any more light on the subject I would refer you to Nathan Lanphear, George Williams, Alfred Bradley, all of Co C 85th Regt NYSV or Lieutenant Col Wellman Commanding the Same Regiment we received a letter from Lieut Col Wellman bearing date Nov 5th stating that he was firmly convinced that my son could never be of any service in the army and it would require the comforts of home and a pure Northern atmosphere to restore him to health and he would try and persuade Doctor Smith to grant a certificate of Disability in his favor but that is the last we have heard about it Major Rufus Scott of the 130th NYSV the same place has solicited Doctor Smith in my sons behalf so has Captain Hutch of the 130th Regt he seems determined to him at all hazards it is due to Doctor Smith to say he has taken the best care of my son that his circumstances would admit since he has been in the Hospital but he is so reduced that he needs a Mothers care Col Wellman writes that other surgeons have discharged so many well ones that Doct Smith is Disgusted and it is almost impossible to get him to sign a certificate in any case Capt Hutch says that the Medical Director there is too strict altogether there is Joseph R Parker from our place in the same company with my son that has not spoken a word since July and no prospect he ever will I humbly beg your pardon for occupying so much of your valuable time

Yours With Esteem

Lydia M. Steenrod

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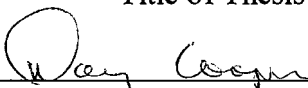


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