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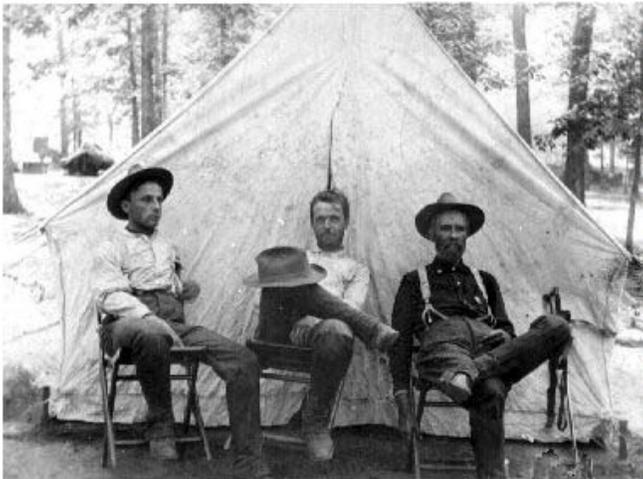
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The Common Soldier and the Homefront: The Civil War and Its Legacy



◀ Union soldiers E. N. Lewis (center) and Martin Perky (right) relax in camp. Soldiers often posed for the camera. CAC general photograph collection. Gift of Mrs. A. L. Bentley, Sr.

The Civil War has gripped American imaginations for well over a century. Battles have been documented exhaustively; scholars have examined the lives, actions, and motives of leaders on both sides of the conflict. The effect of the war on Southern society continues to be the subject of research and romance. Yet life did not go on as usual in the North, either during or after the war.

John Hunt Morgan's raid brought the war to southern Ohio, and a prison for Confederate officers was established on Johnson's Island in Lake Erie. According to one contemporary estimate, as many as one-third of all able-bodied Ohio men were, or had been, actively engaged in the Union forces by the end of 1863 (Reid, 1868).

Letters and diaries of Union soldiers and their families provide researchers at the Center for Archival Collections with a

glimpse of life behind Northern lines. Significant collections include the Borton Family Papers ([MS 462](#)), with correspondence from four brothers who served in companies of the 67th Ohio Volunteer Infantry. Their letters home provide a wealth of detail about camp life as well as battle. Likewise, the Weddell Family Papers ([MS 484](#)) preserve letters from members of the 21st Ohio Volunteer Infantry to a disabled comrade in Wood County. The 21st engaged in battles at Stone River, Chickamauga, and Atlanta.

The George Kryder Papers ([MS 163](#)) add the perspective of the 3rd Ohio Volunteer Cavalry. Kryder, who had a wife and children at home, served throughout the entire war, despite his father's southern sympathies. Letters and diaries of the women of the time reflect the work they did for war relief and the difficulties they encountered in continuing the operation of farms and businesses in a society which expected women to be un-businesslike.

Sutler's records from Johnson's Island Military Prison ([MS 22](#)) document daily transactions at the camp (although specific purchases are not detailed). The military picture of the war is made more complete with a study of the order and morning books from units of the 21st, 18th, and 164th OVI, as well as published regimental histories. Researchers can trace individuals through the *Roster of Ohio Soldiers in the Civil War*.

Because each regiment was recruited from a particular locality, heavy battle losses were felt keenly at home. Modern welfare programs had their start in the orphanages and relief boards set up to support the widows and orphans of servicemen and to assist needy veterans. A special census of veterans and their widows was taken in 1890 which recorded the veteran's service unit, his rank, dates of service, and any disability incurred.

The veterans themselves maintained a spirit of comradeship through the Grand Army of the Republic, whose local posts gathered to hold reunions on the state and national level until after World War II. The records of these organizations and their auxiliaries document an important focus of social activity in the late nineteenth century.

America was not involved in another war for over thirty years. During this long peace, the nation came of age, and the men who had helped to preserve the union were honored as heroes of the republic.

—Lee N. McLaird

Local Governments and the Civil War

At right, an unidentified veteran proudly wears the pin commemorating his service with Company E of the 55th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. Many black Ohioans served in Massachusetts units. CAC general photograph collection. ▶

County officials have kept records regarding the military service of residents at various times. The Civil War and its aftermath are especially well-documented. A wealth of information about how the war affected servicemen, their families, and the general public can be found through such records.

Court of Common Pleas. *Manumissions*, or emancipations from slavery, contain copies of manumission deeds, showing the age, occupation, and physical description of the freed person, as well as the state, county, date the deed was issued, and former owner.

County Auditor. *Civil War Bounties* contain a list of volunteers, company and date of enlistment, age, names of dependents, sworn statements, and abstract of county payments. Such bounties were paid to encourage enlistment. *Commutation Records* concern those men drafted into the Army who chose to pay substitutes to serve for them. They contain a list of conscripts, place of residence, and amount of commutation paid. *Enumeration of Soldiers and Sailors* contain names of veterans, their branch of service, company, regiment, battery, vessel, rank, and address. *Exemptions from Military Service* include affidavits from physicians relative to the condition of men drafted for service, name of draftees, and reason for exemptions. *Militia Rolls* list names of males subject to the draft. The list included all male residents, their ages, and place of residence.



County Recorder. *Soldier's Discharge Records* contain honorable discharges from service showing name and address of soldier, rank, date of birth, and last duty assignment. These records may also contain transcripts of Squirrel Hunters' Discharges. (This was the nickname given to the men who answered the call to defend the city of Cincinnati in 1862.) *Soldiers' Grave Records* include the soldier's name, branch of service, birth, and death dates, and place of burial.

Board of County Commissioners. *Indigent Soldier Burial Records* contain reports of the burial of indigent veterans showing decedent, company, regiment, and branch of service, date of death and burial, undertaker, place of burial, and date payment approved. These records may also be found in the County Auditor's office.

The **Soldiers' Relief Commission** (now Veterans' Assistance) was created in 1886 to provide for the relief of indigent servicemen and the indigent widows and children of deceased veterans. Records such as *Burial and Headstone Applications*, *Burial Records*, *Grave Marker Records*, *Minutes*, and other relief records may be found in this office. Relief records prior to the creation of the commission may be found at the Township Trustees or City Council Office.

Those who are researching the children of Civil War casualties may examine the records of the **County Children's Home** (now Children's Services Board). In 1866 the Ohio General Assembly, in response to a dramatic increase of homeless children following the Civil War, authorized boards of county commissioners to construct orphans' asylums or other facilities and to levy taxes to pay for them. Children's Homes accepted children who were orphaned, abandoned, neglected, inadequately provided for by the parents, or placed in the home by the juvenile court. *Admittance Records and Registers*, *Case Files*, and *Minutes* are just a few of the many valuable records.

—Victor Wagner