

Scioto County and the Civil War

On April 12th, 1861, the blast of the signal gun at Fort Sumter echoed to Scioto County. Portsmouth's location along the river with borders next to free slave states, the railroads and a canal terminus were to make the city a center of activity. The local iron industry produced gun barrels and the armor plates for boats.

On April 15, 1861, President Lincoln called for 75,000 "three-month" volunteers. Portsmouth druggist, Dr. George Bailey, organized the Kinney Light Guards, and our local men were among the first to serve. They later became Company G of the 1st Ohio Volunteer Infantry. It was mustered in the U.S. service in Pennsylvania as the 15th Ohio Volunteer Militia. When they mustered out after their three months, many of the men re-enlisted and became the famous 56th O.V.I. George Bailey had once been a West point cadet, but he resigned his position only to be replaced by Ulysses S. Grant. Imagine how events may have been different if this had not happened.

The 56 O.V. I. was organized at Camp Morrow, Portsmouth, Ohio, under Colonel Peter Kinney and mustered in December 12, 1861. It joined Grant's Vicksburg campaign and fought gallantly at Port Gibson and Champion Hills in May, 1863. The Regiment lost during service; 3 officers and 55 enlisted men killed and mortally wounded and 2 officers and 156 enlisted men by disease thus bringing the total to 216. The monument to this unit is in Vicksburg National Military Park in Vicksburg, Mississippi.

Among other regiments formed with Scioto County men were the 33rd O.V.I., 91st O.V.I., 22nd O.V.I., 81st O.V.I., 117 O.V.I., 2nd Kentucky, Co. F, 22nd O.V.I., a.k.a. the Grosbeck.'

Many more regiments contained men from this area, but none are as well known as the 1st Regiment Light Artillery, Battery L.

Battery L was organized at Portsmouth, Ohio, and mustered in at Camp Dennison, Ohio, October 8, 1861 to January 20, 1862. Ohio was represented by four batteries of gunners at Gettysburg. Members of the 1st Ohio Artillery manned the Army of the Potomac's cannons and helped hold off many Confederate attacks. Battery L lost during service; 1 officer and 7 enlisted men killed and mortally wounded and 1 officer and 15 enlisted men by disease. The monument for this unit is located at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

The Civil War camps in Portsmouth were Camp Portsmouth located on Munn's Run in Clay Township just north of the city and Camp Morrow (also know as Camp Sill and Camp Scioto) that encompassed the area from Offnere east to Young Street, and from 10th north to Robinson.

Ladies Aid Society:

When the first unit from Portsmouth left in 1861, several women formed the Ladies Aid Society. The first soldiers from Portsmouth were killed at the Battle of Vienna in 1861. The following year, the Ladies Aid Society marked May 30th as the day to place flowers on the soldiers' graves and hold memorial services. Headed by Amanda Pursell, these ladies raised funds for the soldiers and their families. Amanda Pursell, a widow, was the only woman known to have hired a man to serve in the war in place of her husband. She insisted that she not know who he was or what happened to him.

The monument in Tracy Park represents John R.T. Barnes, the first soldier from Scioto County to die in the war, and is a memorial to all those who gave their life. It took 12 years to raise the \$7,500 needed for the monument and it was dedicated on May 30, 1879.

Rebels are Coming:

In September of 1862, a rebel raid was reported in Vanceburg, KY. The city was guarded along with men stationed at the bridge. The following day, it was rumored that 1,200 rebels were 3 miles below the city and advancing quickly. The river was checked, but there was nothing. Four companies of militia and one regular troop continued to Vanceburg, but found that only 20 Confederate soldiers had entered looking for food. Prisoners were brought back to Portsmouth.

Morgan's Raiders:

On July 13, 1863, it was reported that General Morgan of the Confederacy, was 10 miles east of Cincinnati and heading for Portsmouth. The Mayor declared martial law and 12,000 troops arrived to guard the city, including 4 gun boats along the Ohio River. The cavalry pursued Morgan, while the infantry stayed to protect the city.

However, the raiders avoided Scioto County when they crossed the Scioto River 30 miles north into Pike County burning bridges behind them. Then they moved onto Jackson County, Ohio. On July 18th, martial law was lifted. Morgan and many of his men were captured up north, and imprisoned in Columbus until their escape back to the south.

Draft

In the war's beginning, soldiers were obtained on a volunteer basis. In 1863, more men were needed, so volunteers were paid \$300 by the government and \$100 by Portsmouth. When even more were needed, the draft was instituted. The Civil War draft or lottery, as it was called, was held in the old G.A.R. building on 3rd street (no longer standing).

Star of the West:

The first shots of the Civil War occurred January 9, 1861 when the Star of the West was fired upon as it approached Ft. Sumter. The ship was captured by the Confederates, being the first prize taken in the war by either side. It was sunk in the Yazoo River. Captain William Moore, brother-in-law to the ship's captain and a steamboat captain himself, wishing a remembrance, visited the wreck and obtained a port hole window that is a part of the family's mausoleum in Greenlawn Cemetery.

Our Last:

In March, 1940, George Farley passed away. He was the last Scioto County Civil War veteran. Farley was born in Portsmouth, and he enlisted at the age of 15. After serving exactly one year to the day, he was promoted to 1st Sergeant of Co. H, 44th Regiment U.S. Colored Troops.