Cranford and the End of the Civil War

by Steven D. Glazer

April 2015 marks the end of the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, a four-year conflict claiming, by some estimates, upwards of 750,000 American lives. Although no known citizens of Cranford were among those who perished, many of our town's residents fought in the war, as well as suffered grievous wounds or debilitating disease. And many participated in the pivotal events leading to the transformative conclusion of that great struggle.

By late summer of 1864 -- more than three years into the war -- Union general Ulysses S. Grant's Overland Campaign in Virginia was stalled before Petersburg and Richmond, after the loss of thousands of Union troops. And General William T. Sherman's federal forces were still attempting to seize Atlanta, a key Confederate center, while also suffering numerous casualties. President Abraham Lincoln's chances for reelection by a war-weary nation that fall looked dim.

Thomas Elliott

But on September 2, 1864, Sherman's troops finally entered Atlanta, where Thomas Elliott -- a future Cranford resident then commanding the 60th New York Infantry -- raised the first Union flag to fly over the city since Georgia's secession from the Union. In large measure because of Atlanta's fall, morale in the North rose and Lincoln was elected to a second term. Elliott would play a similar role during Sherman's destructive March to the Sea through Georgia when, shortly before Christmas, he would be among the first to lead the Union army into Savannah.

It wasn't until early spring of 1865, however, that Grant's Army of the Potomac decisively broke through Confederate general Robert E. Lee's defensive line at Petersburg. It was there on April 2 that future Cranford resident Rufus L. Robinson -- a private in the 121st New York Infantry -- lost his right arm to a minie ball in the final assault on the strategic Southern city. Lee would surrender his Army of Northern Virginia exactly one week later at Appomattox Court House. Present there at the time of the surrender, after pursuing Lee's army from Petersburg, was Henry Vandeveer, an African-American private in the 127th U.S. Colored Troops. Vandeveer would later settle and die in Cranford, one of our town's last Civil War veterans.

About two dozen other Cranford residents were serving with the Union army, navy or Marines at the time of Lee's surrender. These veterans included George W. Ash, Theodore F. Bradley, George

W. Brady, Robert Bray, George W. Cable, Charles H. Clarke, Benjamin D. Dale, Ernest J. Dichman, Charles N. Drake, Edward Ecke, Charles J. Fox, Leon A. Matile, Charles Moses, Joseph C. Mosher, Charles S. Norton, William E. Oakey, William F. Riefenstahl, William J. Smith, George D. Stone, William B. Tunison Sr., Henry Vanlieu and Ferdinand Young.

Samuel H. Lockett

Some two weeks after Lee's surrender, John R. Myrick, a Union artillery officer raised and educated in Cranford and Westfield, was present for duty at Durham, North Carolina, where General Joseph E. Johnston surrendered the Army of Tennessee -- the principal Confederate army in the West -- to General Sherman on April 26. And Samuel H. Lockett, a senior Confederate engineering officer who would later live in Cranford while completing his design for the foundation of the Statue of Liberty, was serving with Confederate general Richard Taylor when he surrendered his Confederate force to Union general Edward R. S. Canby on May 4, 1865, at Citronelle, Alabama.

Some of Cranford's Civil War veterans continued to serve in the Union army long after all the Confederate surrenders were accepted and paroles provided to the Southerners. Vandeveer, the black private, was sent in June 1865 to Texas, where he would serve along the Rio Grande guarding against a French-backed invasion from Mexico. He would not be discharged until September. And Frederick Martin remained with the federal occupying force in Richmond, where he was commissary of musters, finalizing the discharges for Union regiments and seeing to other administrative duties. Martin would not himself be discharged from the Union army until April 1866, a full year after Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox. Martin passed away many years later at his Holly Street home, where he kept a Union flag that, according to family lore, was one of the first to fly over Richmond upon its capture by federal forces.

At least one Cranford resident -- while not serving in uniform -- was said to be present for the most significant event marking the conclusion of the Civil War, the assassination of Abraham Lincoln at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C., on April 14, 1865.

Wesley R. Batchelder

Wesley R. Batchelder served in the final year of the Civil War as private secretary to Union general Benjamin F. Butler, a fellow native of Lowell, Massachusetts. (Frederick Martin, the commissary of musters in Richmond, had previously served as Butler's aide through much of the war.) According to several published accounts, Batchelder missed a boat in Washington to meet Butler at Fort Monroe, Virginia, on April 14 to close down the general's office there. Looking for something to occupy his time that Friday evening, Batchelder attended a performance of "Our American Cousin" at Ford's Theatre. A little after 10:00, he heard a pistol shot and then the terrible screams of Mary Todd Lincoln. Batchelder would lecture about the indelible scene in his mind many years later while serving as a justice in Cranford. After he died at his Holly Street home, Cranford's flags were flown at half-staff.

The obituary of another Cranford resident, George W. Thomas, stated that he, too, was present at Ford's Theatre that fateful night. However, no other record of the assertion was ever found to corroborate the story. Nevertheless, it is possible that two Cranford residents bore witness to one of the most tragic events in our nation's history.
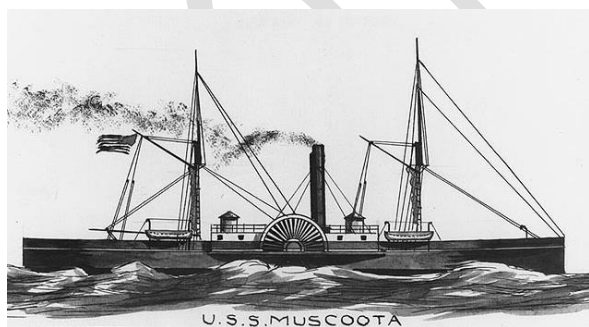
The last surviving Civil War veteran to live in Cranford was John W. Tripp. Tripp was a landsman in the Union navy who entered federal service in the summer of 1864. He served on board the USS *Muscoota*, a steam gunboat, which was dispatched in early May 1865 to the East Gulf Blockading Squadron stationed off Florida to prevent Confederate president Jefferson Davis from escaping abroad after his armies had surrendered. Tripp died at his Berkeley Place residence on November 20, 1935, at age 91. With his passing, the last member of Cranford's generation of Union veterans

was gone. No one was left in town to again tell Cranford's schoolchildren on Memorial Day what it personally meant to have fought to preserve the United States.