

Rutgers College in the Civil War

By Steven Glazer

In the decades immediately following the Civil War, many American colleges published complete catalogs of their alumni who had served in either the Union or Confederate forces. Rutgers College -- now the state university of New Jersey -- was not among them. 150 years later, this historical omission has been rectified. A complete account of the school's veterans has just been published in *The Journal of the Rutgers University Libraries* (Glazer, S.D. "Rutgers in the Civil War," Vol. 66 (2014), pp. 91-120).

The total number of Rutgers alumni now confirmed to have served during the Civil War is 167 former students — at least seventeen having died in service during the war — drawn from the college's classes of 1827 through 1873. This collegiate corps of veterans included about three-dozen medical personnel (mostly Union army surgeons) and about two-dozen Union chaplains (not surprising in view of the college's religious roots). The remainder served mostly in combat positions in the infantry, artillery, and cavalry, as well as in the Union navy. Some few served in the U.S. Sanitary Commission and the U.S. Christian Commission, as well as in specialized support roles, such as paymasters, engineers, and chemists. At least ten Rutgers men served in the Confederate forces. And although about one-third of the college's veterans served in New Jersey units, Rutgers men served in the volunteer regiments of at least twenty Northern and Southern states, as well as in regular military units. The youngest to wear a uniform was fifteen-years old, while the oldest was at least fifty-eight.

The first Rutgers man to enlist and bear arms in defense of the Union during the Civil War was Andrew K. Cogswell, '59, who immediately responded to President Abraham Lincoln's initial call for 75,000 volunteers, issued on April 15, 1861, following the formal surrender of Fort Sumter to the Confederacy. Cogswell—like Cranford's own Henry J. Phillips, namesake of the Crane Phillips House Museum—had enlisted for active duty in Manhattan's famous 7th New York State Militia, also known as the "National Guard." This prestigious unit agreed to drop everything and immediately proceed to Washington as New York's military vanguard, in exchange for the government's promise of only thirty days of federal service being required. On Friday, April 19, 1861—exactly one week after Confederate artillery first fired on Sumter—Privates Cogswell and Phillips (along with two other future Cranford residents) marched down Broadway in lower Manhattan with their regiment, arriving in Washington six days later.

At the very hour Cogswell was preparing to leave for Washington, another Rutgers graduate was at the center of the first hostile bloodshed of the Civil War. George W. Brown, '31, had been elected mayor of Baltimore, Maryland, his native city, in October 1860. In the early afternoon of April 19, he was attempting to quell a large and dangerous mob of Confederate sympathizers, which had attacked the Washington-bound 6th Massachusetts volunteers, another Northern regiment responding to President Lincoln's call. Although a number of Union soldiers and private citizens were killed or injured in Baltimore during the attacks, Mayor Brown's personal intervention may well have prevented even further casualties.

Rutgers alumni were present at almost every major battle and campaign during the Civil War. They fought at Antietam and Gettysburg, Chickamauga and Chattanooga. They served through the Peninsula Campaign of 1862 under General George B. McClellan and the Overland Campaign of 1864 under General Ulysses S. Grant. Rutgers men served under General William T. Sherman

during his Atlanta, Savannah, and Carolina campaigns, and they rode in General Philip H. Sheridan's cavalry through the Shenandoah Valley. They fought at the first battles of the Civil War, and at the final sieges of Petersburg and Richmond. They were also present at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865, when a played-out Army of Northern Virginia under General Robert E. Lee finally surrendered to Grant.

On the home front, Rutgers-educated clergymen, some long absent from Old Queens, would exhort their congregations to help preserve the Union, sometimes urging the younger members to join Lincoln's forces. On July 1, 1861, Rev. Peter D. Oakey, '41, delivered a forceful sermon at Jamaica, Long Island, titled "the War: its origin, purpose, and our duty respecting it." The widely distributed, 28-page sermon concluded with a clarion call to his congregation: "And therefore in the conscious sense of the righteousness of our cause, we pledge ourselves to the support of the Government, till as in former days, our insulted, but yet upright, flag shall again wave over every foot of its rightful territory, the emblem of Justice, Equity, and Liberty."

Rev. Oakey's own son, William Edgar Oakey, would himself enlist and go south to fight for the Union in the 127th New York Infantry. He later married Charlotte Stanton, said to be a Southern relative of Lincoln's Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton. Her brothers were former Confederate officers. William and Charlotte eventually settled in Cranford, where they worked their Orange Avenue farm.

Although there are no known instances where Rutgers family members engaged each other on the battlefield as "brother against brother" during the Civil War, divergent regional sympathies between brothers certainly did not preclude the possibility. Charles R. Goodwin, '60, born in Savannah, Georgia, served in the Confederate army as a staff officer to several Southern generals. At the same time, his older brother, Alexander T. Goodwin, '57, also born in Savannah, served as adjutant of the 45th Regiment of the New York National Guard. Moreover, there were at least two instances where sons of Rutgers were fighting on opposite sides of the same battle, resulting in the combat deaths of two alumni.

At the Union siege of Port Hudson, Louisiana, Private John McGaffin, '64—who enlisted in the 177th New York Infantry after leaving Rutgers in his junior year—was instantly killed when struck by a Confederate artillery shell on June 18, 1863. At the same time, Lieutenant J. Watts Kearny, '54, was in command of a twenty-pound Parrott artillery gun defending the Confederate stronghold.

And on April 6, 1865, Colonel Jacob J. Janeway, '59, was leading the 14th New Jersey Infantry against the rapidly crumbling line of Lee's army at Sailor's Creek, Virginia. Private Alfred O. Bowne, '63, was also there, with the dwindling Confederate troops—starved and exhausted—still resisting an inevitable defeat. Private Bowne, who had left Rutgers to stand with his native Georgia, was mortally wounded that day, making him the last Rutgers fatality of the Civil War. Three days later, General Grant accepted Lee's surrender. General George H. Sharpe, '47—then serving as provost marshal—issued paroles to all of Bowne's surviving comrades in the Army of Northern Virginia, allowing them to return to their homes, after being provided with Union rations.

Three Civil War veterans first enrolled at Rutgers after the conclusion of the war. The last was Madison M. Ball, '73. Ball had fought for three years with the 91st New York infantry in the South, where he participated in the siege and assault on Port Hudson, Louisiana, and in numerous other

engagements. He entered Rutgers in 1869, remaining through his sophomore year, winning a class prize for oration. Ball's principal legacy at Rutgers, however, would be in the postwar emergence of varsity sports. On June 20, 1870, Ball was a member of the college's first intercollegiate crew team, which rowed against a Harvard squad. (Rutgers lost by seven seconds over the three-mile course.) But it was another sports milestone involving Ball that would better be remembered on the banks of the Raritan.

Madison Ball was a member of the Rutgers team that played the nation's first intercollegiate football game on November 6, 1869. Rutgers beat Princeton by 6 goals to 4, with the twenty-eight-year-old Ball securing the third goal for Rutgers, putting it ahead in the game. He advanced the score by running in the same direction as a loose ball, and when it was overtaken, stepping over and kicking it behind him with his heel to a well-placed teammate, who easily completed the play. Ball's athletic prowess was all the more remarkable in view of his wartime leg injury received at the battle of Donaldsonville, Louisiana.

The last surviving Civil War veteran of Rutgers College passed away in his ninety-sixth year on April 27, 1937, in Walla Walla, Washington. Edwin Y. Lansing, '61, had left the campus after two years, later accepting a commission as adjutant of the 50th New York Engineers. In 1863, he was commissioned into the 13th New York Cavalry. Lansing served in the Virginia countryside chasing Mosby's Rangers, commanded by the Confederate "Gray Ghost," Colonel John Singleton Mosby. (Captain Lansing would later be promoted to brevet major for his efforts.) Lansing also spent some time in the field with author Herman Melville, whom he knew through family connections. Melville would later base a wartime poem—"The scout toward Aldie," published in 1866—on these encounters with Lansing and his fellow cavalymen, including the regiment's surgeon, Benjamin R. Taylor, '39.

The nation is now commemorating the sesquicentennial of the Civil War. The contributions made by members of the Rutgers College community, as well as by the citizens of Cranford, during that great struggle were instrumental in bringing about the transformations engendered by the war. These men and their service should not be forgotten.