

CHAPTER IX

"Groverites vs. Garfields"

EVERY TOWN needs a name, and the East Stoughton folks took care of that even before the State Legislature formally approved the petition asking for separation. Monday evening, January 16, 1888 found a large crowd in attendance at Engine House Hall for the purpose of selecting a name for the town. The meeting was called to order by Charles H. Felker, and Jerry Sullivan was chosen chairman for the evening. Although contemporary reports fail to mention it, we may assume there were women present even though, as non-voters, they would have no legal voice in the selection process.

Upon the motion of D.C.G. Field it was decided to allow any voter who wished to suggest a name. The proposals would be listed on a blackboard and after the nominations had been completed they would be voted on. The twelve names with the largest number of votes would be voted on again, narrowing the list to eight, then five, then three, and finally to two, when a final vote would be taken.

The meeting quickly became rowdy as each sponsor of a name hoped to sway votes to his preference. In all, there were nineteen names suggested, including Avon, Grover, Garfield, Glendon, Grandon, Granston, Long Park, Highland Park, Denver, Sumner, Camden, Elliot, Raymond, Woodlawn, Perry, Hillside, Auburn, Sanford, and Ginger. John Geary, with proper reverence for the Auld Sod, tried to suggest Athlone, but there was so much whooping and shouting that he could not be heard and the name was not listed.

Both political partisanship and romance found their way into the voting. Staunch Democrats had suggested the name Grover, after their hero Grover Cleveland. A few of the Groverites, as they called

themselves, had stolen into the upper eaves of the hall and hung a portrait of Cleveland from the rafters. The Republicans had countered with Garfield, in honor of President James Garfield, who had been assassinated in 1881. There was some hassling, Groverites vs. Garfields, and not all of it was good-natured. In fact Constables Geary and Whitten had to be called in to restore order.

On a more romantic note, one young man in the crowd figured that he had hit upon the ideal way in which to immortalize the young woman of his dreams. Fred Thayer, who later became a respected Baptist minister, was enamoured of one of the members of the Sanford Family Orchestra, a well known musical group at the East Stoughton Baptist Church. In his moment of glory Fred shouted "SANFORD!", and the young lady's name went down on the blackboard and into history.

Apparently the girl was not only beautiful, but also pert, vivacious and "snappy," to use an expression of those days. Some of the old-timers in the hall, hoping to tease Fred, called out "GINGER!", and this too went on the blackboard. It isn't known if the young lady ever learned that *two* of the nineteen proposed names for the new town were dedicated to her.

In the final vote the citizens were asked to decide between Avon (which had been considered by North Bridgewater when it was changing its name in 1874) and Grover. In the balloting Avon received seventy-one votes, while Grover netted only thirty-one. Before adjournment someone suggested that the name Avon be made unanimous, and this was quickly accomplished.¹

The first order of business after the town was named was the staging of a giant nighttime "jollification" on Saturday, January 25. The Avon correspondent to *The Brockton Weekly Enterprise* issued an open invitation when he wrote that "We are now free from Stoughton, and have got a brand-new town, with a brand-new name, and consequently

we feel proud and happy and are going to give the town a warming, to which everybody is invited."

The evening of celebration was a great success. Practically all of the houses in town were decorated with jack-o'-lanterns, and there was a torchlight parade with a cavalry brigade in front. A brass band from Brockton provided the music and the festivities ended with fireworks.²

Avon's first town meeting, as directed by the incorporation act of February 21, was held on March 6, 1888 and the following officers were elected: Selectmen, Assessors and Overseers of the Poor were Hiram Blanchard, George W. Robbins and Bartlett Collins. The first town clerk was George J. Smith, the town treasurer was David H. Blanchard and the tax collector was Philip O'Hara. The auditors were William H. Tucker, John Clapp and James Keith, while the highway surveyor was James H. O'Brien. The constables were Cornelius Geary and Orin Whitten, and the school committee members were Dr. Gifford, Orville C. Stockwell and Patrick McGonnigle.³

When Avon and Stoughton separated, committees from the two towns were appointed to study the division of all of Stoughton's public property. Their report, delivered in mid-April, found that at the time of separation the total value of Stoughton's public property was \$104,900, to which Avon was entitled to 20%, or \$20,980. However, the public property of East Stoughton - now Avon - was assessed at \$21,900, so it was agreed that the new town would pay Stoughton \$920 to adjust the figure.

Likewise, it was found that Stoughton's town debt on January 1, before the division, was about \$40,000. Avon agreed to assume 20% of this, as well as a similar percentage of the town's expenses from January 1 to February 25, 1888. Thus, Avon started with a town debt of about \$9,000.⁴

Ironically, about one-third of the value of Avon's public property was settled in its firefighting equipment. This equipment proved sorely inadequate in the early morning hours of July 14, 1888. Scarcely five months after its incorporation, Avon stood in dire peril of losing all of the buildings which surrounded the town square. About midnight an alarm of fire was sounded at the 'southerly end of present-day Goeres Square for a blaze which had originated in Littlefield's shoe factory. When Chief Hiram Blanchard arrived he realized that the conflagration might spell disaster for the town.

As the light from the quickly-spreading fire illuminated the center of town, Chief Blanchard sent for help from nearby communities. The bell of the Avon Baptist Church tolled out the general alarm as townspeople hurried from their houses to find the source of the commotion. They could see the light in the sky and smell the acrid smoke long before they reached the square.

Events that night conspired to render the firemen little more than helpless spectators. The Avon department's single engine hooked up its hoses to the small reservoir in the middle of the square and found the water level so low as to be almost useless. Meanwhile, the Randolph steamer had to return to answer an alarm in that town, which delayed its arrival in Avon by an hour. The Brockton engine was similarly waylaid, being put out of service by a broken pump.

Dawn brought a bleak scene indeed to the small town. Among the buildings totally destroyed were the Avon Hotel and stable, the huge Littlefield shoe factory, another smaller shoe factory, a tannery and at least one private dwelling. The fire, at first labeled suspicious in origin, was estimated to have caused about \$100,000 in damages.⁵

The disastrous fire made townspeople realize that a water system was necessary, and on November 12, 1888 a committee of five was chosen to bring the matter before the State Legislature. Five months later, on

April 9, 1889, an act of the Legislature was passed granting permission for the town to establish a water works, and two weeks later another committee was named to ascertain how much this would cost.

The final report was ready by summer, and on July 31, 1889 a town meeting voted to go ahead with the project. A bond issue was begun for the sum of \$30,000 and work started in the summer of 1889. Before completion of the system another bond issue of \$25,000 was needed.

The construction of the water system, though ultimately successful, was not without problems, and these came from a couple of directions. After a number of tests for clean ground water were conducted it was decided that the best source was the Porter spring on West Main Street. The town therefore offered its owner, Marcus Porter, what it considered a fair price for the property: \$375 for the grass land, \$31.25 for the swamp nearby, \$150 for forty feet of frontage on West Main Street, and \$1,250 for the spring itself.

Porter, who was doing a brisk business selling water to nearby Brockton shoe factories, rejected the offer and set his own price. On April 12, 1889 another act of the Legislature authorized the town to take the property by eminent domain. A protracted court battle followed and Porter was finally awarded \$10,976 for his property.

During the struggle Porter, a deacon of the Avon Baptist Church, let his anger at the town get a bit out of hand. He later admitted that he had dynamited a shack which stood on the property, just to show the town that he wasn't a man to be trifled with.⁵

The old Porter well, incidentally, was used as Avon's principal water source from 1889 to 1942, when its supply became inadequate. The well was replaced in 1942 with a new one on Memorial Drive, but in August 1953 the Porter spring site was outfitted with a turbine pump driven by a 15 horsepower motor. It thereafter became an auxiliary

water supply for the town.⁶

The other problem which beset the construction of Avon's water system bespoke of changing times. It seems that much of the actual ditch digging was done by Italian immigrants who were under contract to a man named Davidson. Although there were some recently-arrived Italians residing in Avon at this time, these laborers apparently lived in Boston or in nearby Brockton.

Trouble developed during the second week of November 1889 when the contractor failed to pay the men on the tenth of the month as promised. On November 11 a number of the laborers walked off the job, and Davidson's attempt to replace them with newly-hired workers met with bitterness and threats of violence. On November 12 the *Boston Herald* reported that "a large number of ringleaders left town," but that "many of the laborers have been riotously inclined during the day."

On November 18 violence erupted, and the *Herald* reported that matters were in a "precarious condition." The newspaper's special correspondent told his readers that: *Blood will soon be shed among the Italian here, unless a speedy settlement in money matters is made. The laborers worked this forenoon on the promise that they should receive their pay this noon. As the money did not arrive the majority quit work, and for some time after tried to induce the remainder to follow them. Not succeeding in this a riot ensued. One of the Italian [workers] was attacked with mud, and retaliated with pick and shovel. He then left the trench and started across the fields, followed by an enraged crowd, who were armed with fence rails, stones, etc. He escaped injury and has not been seen since. After this no work was done, those willing to continue being in fear of assault.*

The situation was finally resolved when the contractor made good on his debt to the men. On November 21, almost two weeks after the

trouble began, work was resumed and the water system was completed in 1890.⁷ The town's first water commissioners were Charles H. Felker, David H. Blanchard and Nathan Tucker.

In 1889 the newly incorporated town of Avon extended its boundaries eastward to annex a small piece of Holbrook which lay between the railroad tracks and the Avon border. The acquisition of this territory met with the approval of both the affected residents as well as the Holbrook town fathers.

The twenty years which followed Avon's incorporation witnessed a great increase in the number of cultural, athletic and social organizations available to the villagers. Throughout the last decade of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, there were more than a dozen social clubs meeting in Avon. Among these were the Grand Army of the Republic, the Sons of Union Veterans, the Zephyr Club, the Massachusetts Catholic Order of Foresters (and their Ladies Auxiliary), the Jolly Dozen Club, the Violet Club, the Pinnacle Society, and the Union Club. The last group boasted that it was the "leading social organization of the town and its membership ... comprised of many of the most prominent young men in the town."

Others in the village lifted their voices in song, either as members of the Old Stoughton Musical Society or the Avon Choral Association of the Baptist Church. Concerts were held several times throughout the year, and judging from contemporary newspaper accounts they were usually well attended. During the summer months the musical programs were often held outdoors.

It was a rare weekend indeed throughout this period when one of Avon's three public meeting halls was not in use. Forrest Hall, later the site of Graham's Garage on North Main Street, and Crispin Hall on West Main Street, were both older structures with limited seating capacities, but the new Enterprise Hall was much more spacious and

accommodating. Located at the southerly end of present-day Goeres Square, this building was dedicated in May 1891. The large hall on the second floor was often the site of dances, socials or school functions.

Sports, too, were extremely popular throughout the period, and this part of Avon's life was helped immeasurably by Highland Park, officially opened on August 11, 1892. Located between East and West Main Streets, this was the old Beals Grove area of town. It was bought and developed by the Brockton Street Railway Company and operated as a "trolley park," so-called because the company hoped to increase its ridership by inducing the Villagers to pay the 5¢ fare to ride the trolley out to the park.

Highland Park had a beautiful picnic area as well as an open air theater, dance hall, and zoo. It also had a large baseball field and sufficient room for other sporting events. Beginning in the 1890s its baseball diamond hosted teams of the Avon Athletic Association as well as the more famous New England League. Not far away the Avon Football Association played its games, as did the teams from Avon's two churches.

Highland Park could accommodate almost any type of public gathering, as shown by a typical week in the late summer of 1898. On August 30 about 14,000 people attended the annual outing of the Old Stoughton Musical Society. The nine-hour festivities included not only singing, but also a band concert, picnic supper, "general promenade," and sightseeing.

One week later much of Avon was back at the park for a field day sponsored by the St. Michael's Catholic Society of Avon and the St. Joseph's Society of Holbrook. After visiting assorted novelty booths the spectators watched several sporting contests which featured teams from Canton, Brockton and Randolph.⁸

One of the most popular activities of the period was cycling. The Diamond Cycle Club, founded about 1891, maintained an active schedule of both riding and socializing throughout the decade. One of the group's favorite activities was the regular bicycle races it sponsored. The course began in Goeres Square and extended down East Main Street to the Brockton line. The return took the riders back into the Square by way of West Main Street. The length of the race was three times around the course, and prizes were awarded to the winners.

On March 9, 1899 one of the greatest athletes ever to come from Avon died at his home in Brockton. He was William Henry McGunnigle, better known to his friends as "Billy," "Gunner," or simply "the Captain." McGunnigle was a baseball player whose great ability made him well known throughout the New England League and beyond. For local people, he became a legend.

Born in East Stoughton on January 1, 1855, McGunnigle began playing baseball while scarcely in his teens. A catcher early in his career, he later developed a reputation as a smart, though not overpowering, pitcher. When not on the pitcher's mound, he was one of the best outfielders in baseball. Although he never hit for a high average, he was known throughout the game as a man who could always scratch out a single when his team most needed a base runner.

McGunnigle played in the Brockton area until 1874 and then moved to join a Fall River team. In 1879 he was the star rightfielder and relief pitcher for Buffalo in the National Association. It was while he was with the Buffalo club that he wore the prestigious Clipper medal, awarded to the country's best rightfielders. He later played briefly in Cleveland for another team in the National Association.

In 1880 McGunnigle managed the Buffalo team for seventeen games. From 1888 through the 1890 season he managed at Brooklyn, and in the following year he moved on to manage at Pittsburgh. He returned

to the Brockton area briefly before finishing out his baseball career by managing eighty-nine games at Louisville in 1896. He then came home to the New England area and settled in Brockton. Still an avid baseball man, McGunnigle co-sponsored a team in the New England League for a season or two. He was only 44 years-old when death found him.

The sixth edition of *The Baseball Encyclopedia* lists Bill McGunnigle in three different categories: outfielder, pitcher and manager. As an outfielder at Buffalo and then Cleveland he hit only .173, and unfortunately there are no statistics to attest to his great defensive skills. As a pitcher at Buffalo he worked 157 innings, winning eleven games and losing eight. His 2.81 ERA was excellent. As a manager at Buffalo, Brooklyn, Pittsburgh and Louisville he won 324 games and lost 244. His place in the record books was assured by the fact that his Brooklyn teams finished first in 1889 and 1890.⁹

In addition to the several social and sporting activities, other events enhanced the quality of life in Avon. In March 1892, for example, an electric trolley system replaced the old horsecars, which had run since 1884. Operating between Brockton and East Stoughton under the ownership of the Brockton Street Railway Company, the horsecars were a reliable and familiar means of transportation. John W. Briggs, who died in 1907, had the honor of driving the first one through the village, and he was well known for it everafter. Other drivers were Jack Donahue and Tom Chisholm. The horsecar drivers wore white gloves and black bow ties. William Taylor, who owned a store in Avon's square, kept a large stock of these articles on hand to supply the drivers.

Preparations for the trolley system were begun in November 1891, when poles were set and the ground staked out. The work went ahead of schedule and the first trolley was run more than two months earlier than expected. The trip from Avon to Brockton took slightly less than thirty minutes. Tickets were 10¢ each, three for 25¢. The trolley system

remained in operation until about 1930.¹⁰

The introduction of electric cars between Brockton and Avon raises an interesting point in the transportation history of the town. From the earliest times it was easier to travel in a north-south direction (to North Bridgewater or Boston) than it was to travel in an east-west direction (toward Stoughton). This was true from the earliest days of the Old Beaten Path, to the completion of the Old Colony Railroad line from Randolph through East Stoughton in 1846, and later to the horse and trolley cars. Had it been otherwise, the village may never have found it necessary to separate from Stoughton.

On November 26, 1892 the Avon Public Library was opened upstairs over the Engine House. Its first trustees were Dr. Gifford, John T. Callahan and Orville C. Stockwell; the first librarian was Charles N. Blanchard. The new library replaced a system in which books were brought over from Stoughton Centre and loaned to villagers one week at a time.

In 1898 the library received a gift of \$500 from Lucius Clapp, of Randolph, a former Stoughton educator and a benefactor of its schools and library. By 1901 the 561 Avon cardholders could choose from among 2,211 volumes in the library. The Dewey Decimal System was introduced in 1906 and the collection continued to grow until a devastating fire struck on October 12, 1913. Suffering from severe smoke and water damage, the library was forced to close for five months while repairs were made.

The years after incorporation were also important to the educational history of Avon. A school system which had about 230 students in 1888, saw that number increase to 250 in 1893, and jump again to 333 in 1901. By 1895 the increasing enrollment brought severe overcrowding to the town's two schools. The Littlefield, for example, was a one-room schoolhouse. Constructed in 1847, it had a seating

capacity of sixty-six, but in 1895 the teacher there had seventy-nine pupils, and she complained that when they all showed up for school thirteen of them had to sit on straight chairs placed in the aisles.

On January 31, 1896 an early morning fire roared through the Littlefield and burned the East Main Street school to the ground. The new Littlefield which replaced it was a more spacious four-room building, each room having forty-nine desks and chairs. This school was used by the town until 1960.

The Gifford School also felt the pinch of overcrowding. Opened in 1873, it had certainly seemed large enough at the time, but the additional demands placed upon it in the 1890's proved to be too much of a strain. In 1905 the Gifford was so crowded that the town had to rent a room in a building located on the corner of Main and High Streets to handle the overflow from the second grade. In 1907 the town voted to spend \$10,000 to enlarge and remodel the school.

Part of the Gifford School's problem came from Chapter 436 of the Public Statutes of Massachusetts, passed on May 26, 1894. This law required any town that didn't have a high school to pay for the tuition and transportation of its students to neighboring school districts. Thus motivated, the town instituted its own high school in September 1894. It was housed at the Gifford School and Frederick Shaw was hired as its first principal.

For some time the Avon school committee had hoped to join with Randolph and Holbrook in hiring a school superintendent to oversee educational matters in the three towns. The idea was temporarily abandoned in 1899, however, when the committee decided to combine the position of high school principal with that of school superintendent. John Carroll assumed both jobs, and in 1900 he was paid \$922.22 as principal, and another \$70.54 as superintendent.

Not only was Mr. Carroll the principal/superintendent, he was also a teacher in the high school, and this caused the committee to revive its plan of joining with the other towns in a regional superintendency. The committee members were concerned, they said, because Carroll's administrative responsibilities "detracted considerably" from his effectiveness as a classroom teacher.

In April 1901 the towns of Avon, Holbrook and Randolph hired Dr. John E. Bradley as superintendent of schools. A former president of Illinois College, he began on July 1 with an Avon enrollment of 333 children. One of the first activities of the school year was bringing students down to Forrest Hall for a memorial service in honor of recently assassinated President William McKinley.¹¹

The first two decades of the twentieth century were eventful ones for the little town. The period began with ice skating parties before a roaring bonfire in Sam Beals' meadow, and it ended with the First World War, when Avon, like the rest of America, grew up.

In 1901 there were wrestling matches held in the Crispin Building and the Avon Choral Association was especially active. However the big event of that year, one which caused "great excitement," according to a newspaper report of the day, was the explosion of an automobile's engine as it made its way through the square. It has been written that one of the first cars in town belonged to Dr. Richard Elliot, a well known Avon physician. These new machines must have been common enough, because in June 1905 the town voted to limit the speed of automobiles passing through the square to 10 m.p.h. "Much dissatisfaction has been expressed of late," reported the *Boston Globe*, "at the extreme high speed attained by many parties from other localities especially while passing through the center of town."¹²

In 1905 an Avon landmark was moved to another location so that the Soldiers' Monument which stands in present-day Goeres Square could

be built. The town drinking fountain, placed at the junction of East and West Main Streets in 1890, was relocated to the corner of West High and Main Streets, where it stood until May 10, 1951. Today it stands in front of the Blanchard House Museum and at this writing is in the process of being restored.

This old fountain meant a lot to the townspeople. Part of the money needed to purchase it came from a donation from the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and the rest was raised by public subscription. In the center of the basin was an iron column, to which was attached a plaque bearing the words "Blessed are the Merciful." On top of the column was a kerosene oil lamp which was lighted nightly by either Fred Goldthwaite or Hugh Horn, the official town lamplighters.¹³

The Soldiers' Memorial which displaced the fountain was the gift of Orlando Leach, a direct descendant of Captain Simeon Leach, who had led the East Stoughton company during the American Revolution. A native of East Stoughton himself and an 1860 graduate of Yale University, Mr. Leach served as a captain during the Civil War, assigned to administrative work among the sea islands of South Carolina. Admitted to the bar in 1863, he entered the publishing business in New York City after the war. At the end of a long and successful career there, he returned to his hometown and immersed himself in local affairs. He held a variety of public and church offices, including selectman.

The Soldiers' Monument was dedicated on May 30, 1905. The main address was given by Reverend Charles Stowe, a son of Harriet Beecher Stowe, and the unveiling was completed by Miss Lillian E. Leach, the donor's niece. The invocation and benediction were given by Reverend W.H. Harriman.

The height of the monument is twenty-two feet, and the Civil War

soldier on top stands five feet, six inches. The base of the statue was carved out of Quincy granite, while the rest of the monument is of Westerly granite.¹⁴ Mr. Leach, in whose debt the town remains for this landmark, died in 1918, but not before completing a journey around the world.

There were other changes in the area around the square during this period. In 1906 the automatic fire alarm system was installed, and the new red call boxes were placed strategically throughout the town. The following year saw the dedication of the Swedish Lutheran Home on Main Street, next to the present-day Blanchard's Tavern, Formally opened on April 20, 1907 this was an orphanage operated under the auspices of the New York Lutheran Conference. The Home's first matron was Miss Amelia Rabenius, and she was assisted by Misses Hannah Anderson and Marie Wallin. The Swedish Lutheran Home continued in operation until just before World War II, and was finally demolished in the mid-1950's.

The year 1908 saw St. Michael's Church constituted as a separate parish with Reverend Edwin J. Dolan as pastor. Although Father Dolan stayed only one year in Avon, he left an important legacy behind when he was transferred to Brockton. Shortly after arriving in town Father Dolan purchased the Hiram Blanchard Estate on North Main Street for use as a rectory. This property later became the site of the present St. Michael's church and rectory.

Father Dolan was succeeded by Reverend Charles T. Glennon in 1909, and he served for six years before giving way to Reverend Albert M. Readdy, who was pastor of St. Michael's from 1915 to 1917. Father Readdy was in turn replaced by Reverend Leo F. O'Neil, who served from 1917 to 1931. Throughout this entire period both the Holy Name Society and the Ladies' Sodality maintained a full schedule of religious and social activities.¹⁵

In 1909 the Bows Moccasin Company moved to Avon, promising to increase the number of jobs available to local citizens. Although the number of Avon shoe firms had steadily diminished through the final quarter of the nineteenth century, hundreds of villagers continued to work in the shoe trade, employed by one of the few firms still located in town, or more likely in one of the Brockton factories.

In 1909 the town voted to install electric street lights, but this was no easy decision. The matter had been studied for several years, but the expense was so great that the voters had each year defeated the article when it appeared on the town meeting warrant. By 1910, however, the eerie glow of Avon's first electric street lamps illuminated the center of town.

In 1910 word reached Avon of the death of Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of the Christian Science Church. It is possible that there were still a few of the older villagers left who remembered that Mrs. Eddy had resided in East Stoughton during the winter of 1866-1867. That was before her marriage to Asa Gilbert Eddy, and in those days she was known as Mrs. Mary Patterson. She spent that winter as the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Hiram Crafts in their home on Pond Street. Indeed she was Mr. Crafts' teacher in the theory of faith healing. In the spring of 1867 she moved with the couple to nearby Taunton, where the relationship ended. She subsequently moved to Amesbury, Massachusetts and then in 1868 returned to Stoughton, where she lived for about two years with the Wentworth family on Central Street, just over the Avon line.¹⁶

By 1915 the enrollment of Avon High School had climbed to 97 students. That year marked an especially successful fall exhibition of produce grown in the students' home gardens. George Lawson, for example, won first place for his potatoes, and William Pope captured the title for his pumpkin. Other prizes were awarded to the growers of

noteworthy vegetables or flowers.¹⁷

In 1916 President Woodrow Wilson was re-elected with the help of a plurality of Avon's votes. This was a different outcome indeed from the election four years earlier, when the town went for former President Theodore Roosevelt, giving him a two vote margin over Wilson. "T.R." had also carried the town in 1904, so the election saw Avon swing (temporarily) Democratic.

On April 24, 1916 at a special town meeting, the voters agreed to purchase a new fire engine. The sum of \$5,400 was paid to the Seagrave Company, which delivered the first motorized fire truck in Avon's history.¹⁸ This piece of apparatus remained in service until 1941.

From 1914 on, the eyes of the townspeople turned toward Europe, where ominous events were taking shape. As the world inched toward another war, the villagers must have feared that this would be the second time in as many decades that local boys would be called to fight in far-off conflicts. Many townspeople still remembered the war with Spain, which had been fought in 1898.

We have no exact record of how many of Avon's young men fought in the Spanish-American War, but there was a great wave of patriotism that spread across the country when the *U.S.S. Maine* was sunk in Havana Harbor in February 1898. The members of the Avon Athletic Association offered their services en masse to the Governor of Massachusetts in case of emergency. The following July, when news of the American capture of Santiago, Cuba reached Avon there was a half hour-long street celebration.

The United States was victorious in the "splendid little war," as Theodore Roosevelt called it, but the price was steep. More than 2,400 Americans died, and about six times as many soldiers succumbed to

disease as were killed in battle.

One of the dead was Corporal William Robbins of Avon. A veteran of the Sanitago campaign, the 24-year-old soldier died of yellow fever in August 1898. Corporal Robbins was a member of the 22nd U.S. Infantry, and had last visited his mother's High Street home a few months before leaving for Cuba.¹⁹

Nineteen years later, in April 1917, war was again declared, this time on a global scale. No matter, the villagers responded to this emergency as they had to all the others; they enlisted in large numbers. In all, 106 Avon boys, and one of its young women, answered their country's call, this time to "make the world safe for democracy."

Private William R. Davis, a local boy, received the Distinguished Service Cross as well as the Croix de Guerre for extreme heroism under fire. He had prevented a large number of heavily armed Germans from overrunning his trench along the Western Front. In fierce fighting, Davis had killed five enemy soldiers, wounded several more, and captured still more before being wounded himself. In a letter home, he explained to his folks that he was recovering quickly despite the fact that he had been wounded twenty-one times. Among his injuries was the loss of half a finger, bitten off by a German soldier he was trying to subdue. He captured the enemy soldier nevertheless, he said.²⁰

Another medal-winner was Corporal Orlando L. Graham, later a popular Avon police chief. He also received the Croix de Guerre and a citation for extreme bravery. Private Carminiel L. Puopolo was a local boy who was captured by the Germans and held for seven months before being liberated. Mary A. McIsaac served as an army nurse overseas throughout the war.

This war, like all the others, brought heartaches to the town. Two Avon boys were killed and their loss was keenly felt. Private Charles

L. Whiting, a member of Headquarters Company, 308th Infantry, American Expeditionary Force, was killed at Barbanville, France on September 10, 1918, just before his twenty-fourth birthday. He was the son of Mrs. Annie Battles, of East Main Street.

A month later, on October 15, 1918, Private Andrew L. Goeres was killed in action near Verdun, France. His death was a bitter blow indeed to his family. "Bud," as he was called, was the only boy among the six children of Frank and Mary Goeres of East High Street. Andrew's father was a well known musician, and his sister Minnie was for many years the director of music in both the Avon and Stoughton schools. A contemporary newspaper account noted that the young soldier had been "a clever violin player."

Andrew Goeres was one of those sweetly mischievous children who are so often associated with small town America. A handsome young man and a fine athlete, he was equally at home on the baseball field at Highland Park, or on stage in a minstrel show at Enterprise Hall. "He was sure to be the centre of the group with some humorous yarn," said one newspaper account. "He was full of wholesome fun and radiated it wherever he went."

Private Goeres had enlisted on April 25, 1918 as a member of Company K, 165th Infantry of the 42nd Rainbow Division of the A.E.F., one of the best known fighting units in the service. He departed Camp Devens for Europe on July 4, and was killed less than five weeks before the end of the war. He died at Landres Et. St. Georges, France, one of the many American boys claimed by the Argonne Meuse offensive.

The Goeres family was attending a high school play at the Gifford School when the telegram from the War Department arrived telling them that Andrew was dead. Young Ruth Goeres, his sister, had a part in the play so no one went to the school to notify them. They returned

home to find Father O'Neil from St. Michael's waiting, and perhaps then they knew that much of the light had gone out of their lives.

Private Goeres rested in the rocky soil near Verdun for five years before his body was returned to the United States. After a funeral with full military honors, he was buried in St. Michael's Cemetery on September 17, 1923. Among the most affected by this was Andrew McCabe, the soldier's maternal grandfather. Eighty-nine years-old and bed-ridden with a broken hip, the old man held a special place in his heart for young Andrew. Approaching death himself, the old shoemaker saw his young namesake buried in the same graveyard which he had bought for the parish more than forty years before.²¹

The town, saddened by the loss of its two young men, searched for ways in which to memorialize them. In March 1920 it was voted to name the town square after Andrew Goeres, and the following May it was voted to change the name of East Main Street to Whiting Street. In spite of their desire to honor Private Whiting, several people objected to changing the name of one of Avon's oldest streets, so the State refused to approve the request. Shortly thereafter, it was decided to name the local American Legion Post for the young soldier. On September 21, 1921 the Charles L. Whiting Post No. 200 was chartered.²²

In the fall of 1918, as the fury of the war in Europe was starting to wane, Avon suffered through a terrible influenza epidemic which killed thousands across the country. The first week in October was the real period of crisis. Dr. Richard Elliot of the Board of Health later reported that during that week alone there were 200 cases in town, and some of the sick were desperately ill. "Many households were found with the entire family afflicted," he wrote. "One such [household] held twelve helpless and terrified victims, one of their number wandering from room to room in the active delirium of a fatal pneumonia."

During the epidemic the Board of Health maintained an emergency

office, open twenty-four hours a day. There was a critical shortage of nurses which couldn't be filled. The State finally sent one, and the Randolph visiting nurse attended to as many patients as she could. Both of these women rendered, in Dr. Elliot's words, "heroic service."

In all there were 512 cases of influenza reported in Avon, with twelve deaths. The town was relatively fortunate, however, for in nearby Brockton there had been 2,800 cases of flu, with 265 deaths. It had cost that city \$40,000 to deal with the emergency.²³

The thirty years after its incorporation saw Avon assume an independent character with its own institutions and leaders. This was fortunate indeed, for the next period in its life would test the strength and resilience of the village. It would be a time of great crises, both domestic and foreign, and from it would emerge much of the Avon which we know today.

NOTES

1. *The Stoughton Sentinel*, January 21, 1888; Collins, 1938, n.p.; the "Ginger Sanford" incident is reported in "Little Walks and Little Talks About Brockton," *The Brockton Times*, June 23, 1931.

2. *The Brockton Weekly Enterprise*, January 25, 1888; "A History of Avon, 1888-1938," a series of brief newspaper articles edited by Warren R. Brown and clipped in the Lorch Scrapbooks, Avon Historical Society. This very superficial overview was published in *The Avon Messenger*, probably in 1938; hereinafter cited as *Brown's History*.

3. Collins, 1938. n.p.: *Avon Town Reports, 1888*, frontispiece.

4. *The Stoughton Sentinel*, April 14, 1888: *Avon Town Reports, 1888*,

pp. 18-21.

5. *Brown's History*, n.p.; loose clippings in the Lorch Scrapbooks, Avon Historical Society.

6. *The Brockton Enterprise*, August 15, 1953.

7. *Boston Herald*, November 11, 12, 13, 18, 19, 20, 21, 1889.

8. This report of the social, cultural and athletic activities of early Avon comes from numerous newspaper clippings, undated unless specified, in the Lorch Scrapbooks, Avon Historical Society.

9. McGunnigle's obituary is found in the *Brockton Daily Enterprise*, March 10, 1899. See also John L. Reichler, ed., *The Baseball Encyclopedia*, 6th ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1985), pp. 640; 1185; 1902.

10. Lorch Scrapbooks, Avon Historical Society.

11. All of the above information is taken from the annual reports filed by the superintendent of schools and the Avon school committee. They are found in the *Avon Town Reports* under the appropriate years.

12. *The Boston Globe*, June 8, 1905. From a clipping found in the Lorch Scrapbooks, Avon Historical Society.

13. "Drinking Fountain, Famous Landmark Has Been Moved," *The Avon Messenger*, May 11, 1951.

14. The biographical material on Orlando Graham is found in *Biographical Record, Class of Sixty, 1860-1906* (Boston: The Fort Hill Press, 1906), pp. 134-35; the dedication of the monument is covered in *The Avon Messenger*, November 17, 1945, and also in handwritten notes in the Lorch Scrapbooks, Avon Historical Society. Also helpful

was a conversation with Mr. Everett Graham, an Avon resident and a descendant of Orlando Leach.

15. William A. Clark, "History of St. Michael's Parish, 1908-1983," in *St. Michael's Church, 1908-1983: 75th Anniversary*. This was printed by Hansen Bros. Printing Co., of Stoughton, in observance of the seventy-fifth anniversary of St. Michael's. It is available at the public library as well as at the church.

16. Kenneth Hufford, *Mary Baker Eddy and the Stoughton Years* (Brookline, Mass.: Longyear Foundation, 1963), pp. 4-6; Sibyl Wilbur, *The Life of Mary Baker Eddy* (New York: Concord Publishing Co., 1907), pp. 154-65.

17. *Avon Town Reports*, 1915. pp. 123-25.

18. *Avon Town Reports*, 1916, p. 16.

19. Lorch Scrapbooks, Avon Historical Society. There are seven Spanish-American War veterans from Avon, not including Corporal Robbins, buried in area cemeteries. To this writer's knowledge, Robbins is the only casualty of that war from Avon.

20. Undated newspaper clipping found in the Goeres Family Scrapbook, now in the possession of Joseph Zablocki of Avon. A word of explanation is in order here. Frank L. and Mary Goeres, of whom much is to be said shortly, had six children. The last surviving child was Miss Esther Goeres, who died at the age of 90 in 1985. Upon her death two scrapbooks which had been kept by her mother went to the Zablocki family, Esther's friends. They are now in the care of Joseph, who is 11 years-old at this writing. "Aunt Esther" was his best friend, he says, and she rests in the knowledge that her papers are in good hands. They are used in this work courtesy of Joseph, and are hereinafter cited as Goeres Family Papers.

21. Undated newspaper clipping, Goeres Family Papers.

22. *Avon Town Reports*, 1920, pp. 67; 73-75. The town listed the names of those who served their country in World War I in the 1920 Town Report, pp. 113-16. One name was omitted, that of Charles A. MacDonald, and he was listed as an addendum to the 1921 Town Report.

23. *Avon Town Reports*, 1918, pp.39-41.