

## CHAPTER VII

"We will fight side by side"

IN THE AVON Historical Society collection at the Blanchard House Museum, there is a picture of a group of men in uniform, standing ramrod straight in the light of the afternoon sun. The occasion of the photograph was a 1915 reunion of local Civil War veterans. The fading image is all that is left of them now, and it brings a little sadness to think of them as they must have looked as young men marching off to war.

The great issue of the middle third of the nineteenth century was slavery - or rather the *extension* of slavery into the vast territory won from Mexico in the war of 1846-1848. Southerners claimed the right to bring their "peculiar institution" into these new lands. Northerners, infused with the notion of "Free soil, free labor, free men," resisted. Extremists on both sides created many of the problems which led to the Civil War. No one, whether he lived in Boston or Charleston or even East Stoughton could have foreseen the bloodbath this contest produced.

There was never any doubt about where the people of East Stoughton stood on the matter. Friendly to the Republican party since its inception in 1854, they gave Abraham Lincoln a victory of more than two-to-one in the election of 1860.<sup>1</sup> They stood ready to defend the Union when the call to arms was broadcast.



There was a good deal of excitement in the village even before the outbreak of war. The temperance movement had gained new momentum throughout that final summer and fall of peace. Economic times weren't good, and the boot and shoe industry was suffering. On March 18, 1861, which was just two weeks after President Lincoln had taken office, a meeting described as "pretty full" was called to organize a strike among the bootmakers. "We have been making boots for five dollars a case that we had ten and twelve for in 1859-60." Complained their correspondent to a local newspaper." We think we have paid the bosses for the privilege of breathing long enough, and now we think of tacking and go[ing] to the poorhouse, or raise our wages."

Three weeks later, and just three days before the Confederates opened fire on Fort Sumter, the unhappy workers announced the formation of the Boot and Shoemakers' Loan and Fund Association. Membership dues of \$10 were payable in installments.<sup>2</sup> This agitation would fade quickly enough, however, for the workers would not have to complain about the lack of work for very long.

On April 12, 1861, Fort Sumter was bombarded by the shore batteries that rimmed the harbor at Charleston, South Carolina. Under-supplied and badly out-gunned, the garrison surrendered the next day. Lincoln's call for 75,000 men to put down the rebellion was answered quickly as volunteers, young and old, pledged themselves to the defense of the Union. In East Stoughton, as elsewhere, feeling ran high. "War, war, war is the constant cry," reported the village correspondent to the *North Bridgewater Gazette*.<sup>3</sup>

Approximately ninety-five of the 530 soldiers sent by Stoughton for service in the Union army came from East Stoughton, and that was a remarkable turnout for a village whose total population was only about 600.<sup>4</sup> These local men served in more than twenty different regiments, as well as in the U.S. Navy. When the war was over the toll in dead and wounded was found to be a heavy one: eighteen villagers had been discharged on account of sickness or injury. Some returned home to die soon after, suffering from the diseases they had contracted in the swamps of Virginia or Louisiana. Others were permanently disfigured by the loss of their sight or limbs. Sixteen of East Stoughton's finest young men never returned at all. Ten had fallen in battle, while the rest had succumbed to accident or illness.

In that tumultuous spring and summer of 1861, East Stoughton men enlisted for service in several regiments about to leave for the seat of the war. This was the last conflict in which village men could march together, knowing that their groups would remain intact until their discharge.

The largest contingent of villagers joined Company K of the 9th Massachusetts Regiment of Volunteer Infantry. This was one of the two Bay State regiments consisting almost entirely of men of Irish birth. Twelve East Stoughton men left Boston on June 25, 1861 for Virginia. Carrying not only the national and state colors, the 9th Mass. also carried an Irish flag into battle.

The men of the 9th saw no combat for almost a year after leaving home, but they more than made up for it during General George B. McClellan's Peninsula Campaign in the summer of 1862. The East Stoughton boys saw heavy fighting at Hanover Court House,

Mechanicsville, Gaines' Mill and Malvern Hill. In the final two battles the regiment saw 111 of its members killed, including its organizer, Colonel Thomas Cass, of Boston. At the end of the campaign, Richmond remained in Confederate hands thanks to McClellan's retreat.

So severely did the 9th Mass. suffer on the Peninsula that it was held in reserve at Second Bull Run, Antietam and Fredericksburg. It spent the winter of 1862-1863 in camp at Falmouth, Virginia, and was present at both Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, but suffered no serious losses. Winter, 1863-1864, was spent at Bealton Station, Virginia.

The 9th Mass. was back in action in the spring of 1864 and suffered heavy losses at the Wilderness and Spotsylvania. Seventy-eight men were killed in these two engagements, which were fought in the Virginia countryside amidst the beauty of May flowers. Later the men of the 9th Mass. fought at the North Anna River and at Cold Harbor, and on June 10, 1864 the regiment was withdrawn from the front lines and sent home, its period of enlistment having expired.

The troopship which sailed into Boston Harbor on June 15 carried a very happy contingent of East Stoughton men. Remarkably, none of them had been killed, though at least four had received disability discharges and two others had deserted.<sup>5</sup>

East Stoughton had two representatives in the state's other Irish regiment, the 28th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. Daniel Connery enlisted as a sergeant in Company C on December 13, 1861. He was wounded in action on June 16, 1862, but recovered in time to rejoin his regiment in front of Fredericksburg, Virginia. In one of the worst slaughters in American military history, Sergeant Connery was shot dead on the slopes of Marye's Heights. He died on the first anniversary of his muster into the service.

Another member of the 28th Mass. Regiment was William Currivan, a 30 year-old East Stoughton bootmaker who enlisted in Company C with his friend Connery. Severely wounded at Second Bull Run in August 1862, he was given a disability discharge in January 1863. In February 1864, Currivan re-enlisted in Company I of the 56th Mass.

Regiment and was killed in action at the Wilderness on May 5, 1864.<sup>6</sup>

In June 1861, another group of villagers enlisted in Company K of the 11th Massachusetts Regiment, and these men saw almost continuous fighting throughout the war. The 11th Mass. was one of the three Bay State regiments present at First Bull Run in July 1861, and it fought the following year at Williamsburg and Fair Oaks on the Peninsula, as well as at Second Bull Run, where it sustained heavy casualties. These men were in the thick of the fight at Chancellorsville, and at Gettysburg they lost heavily trying to defend the Union III Corps' line along the Emmitsburg Road on the afternoon of July 2, 1863.

In 1864 the regiment continued its bloody record, sacrificing many soldiers at Spotsylvania and the Wilderness, and later at Cold Harbor and Petersburg. In 1865 the 11th Mass., with the East Stoughton men still in the ranks, joined with other Union forces in closing off Lee's escape route to the west. The regiment was near Appomattox on that fateful April day in 1865 when the hopes of the Confederacy faded forever.<sup>7</sup>

When the 11th Mass. Regiment returned home in the summer of 1865, two of its members were absent from the celebration. John Decoster had died of disease in 1862, and William B. Foster, a member of Company D, had drowned when his transport ship sank in the Potomac River. Poor Foster, a bootmaker by trade, had been a prisoner of war and had just been exchanged and sent on his way home. He died on April 23, 1865, two weeks after Lee's surrender.<sup>8</sup>

In June and July 1861, five East Stoughton men enlisted in Company F of the 12th Massachusetts Regiment, known as the "Webster Regiment" because it had been recruited by Fletcher Webster, son of statesman Daniel Webster. Five companies were raised in Boston, and one each from Abington, Stoughton, North Bridgewater, Weymouth and Gloucester. The regiment fought first at Cedar Mountain and then at Second Bull Run, where Colonel Webster and twenty-four of his men were killed. At Antietam on September 17, 1862 the regiment fought in the famous Bloody Cornfield, where it suffered a staggering 224 casualties, including

seventy-four killed.

At the Battle of Fredericksburg, on December 13, 1862, the 12th Mass. took part in the assault on the right end of the Confederate line, where it lost heavily. Among the dead was Jerome K. Hodge of East Stoughton.

The regiment was present at Chancellorsville in May 1863, and also at Gettysburg, where it took many casualties on the right of the Union line. In 1864 the 12th Mass. was engaged at the Wilderness, where it lost Sergeant Frank M. Stoddard, an East Stoughton man who had answered his country's call when he was only 19 years-old.

The Webster Regiment finished its service in action at the North Anna, Cold Harbor, and in front of Petersburg. On June 25, 1864 its members finally left the battlefields of Virginia, having fulfilled their three-year commitment. They arrived home on July 1, 1864.<sup>9</sup>

Other East Stoughton men also enlisted in the Union Army during the spring and summer of 1861. Caught up in the great surge of patriotism which swept the North after the fall of Sumter, two village men were mustered into the service with the 20th Mass. Regiment, and four others joined the ranks of the 29th Mass. Regiment. Most of these men were out of the service before the end of the war.

Back on the homefront, that summer saw a great deal of activity as the people of Stoughton and its village to the east made ready to support the war effort. At that point no one expected a long war, but citizens were ready to do what needed to be done in any case. On April 22, 1861 a town meeting was held at which it was resolved: *That it is the sense of this meeting that we pledge ourselves as a town to see that all families of such persons as shall be accepted as volunteers in the present struggle to execute our National laws shall receive all proper support, and that a committee of two from each school district be appointed to see that all such families shall be supplied previous to Saturday next, and that they report at that time what measures are necessary to be taken for the future.*

Two weeks later the town voted to pay \$12 a month to the wife of each married volunteer, and an additional \$2 for each dependent

child under age fifteen. If the volunteer died while in the service his wife and children would continue to receive these benefits until the end of the war.

The town appointed a committee to distribute this money, and an additional \$1,000 was set aside for cases not provided for under the foregoing arrangements. From 1861 to 1865 the town of Stoughton spent almost \$40,000 for aid to soldiers' families.<sup>10</sup>

Not all of the news from East Stoughton that summer pertained to the war, nor was all of it a source of pride to the village. On July 9, 1861 the *North Bridgewater Gazette* reported that a crowd of men and boys had attacked the Baptist church. Using ladders belonging to the fire department, the vandals broke forty windows and did considerable damage to the shutters. Decrying this "mobocratic spirit," the newspaper also reported that on the same night buildings belonging to a black family had been torched. The paper did not say whether there was any suspected connection between the two incidents.<sup>11</sup>

The war, of course, stimulated the boot and shoe industry. Soldiers needed shoes, and the village of East Stoughton prospered as a result. By the end of September 1861, one correspondent told a newspaper that "Nearly all of our mechanics who ever made a boot, are busy in making Government shoes. Old men who forty years ago made 'sewed work,' are now drawing the thread as lively as the young men. This, together with our boot manufacturers, gives ample employment to the great mass." It was also reported that one East Stoughton manufacturer had been offered a contract to make several thousand pairs of cavalry boots. After the war it was said that the Littlefield factory alone had produced more than 6,000 pairs of shoes for the Union army.<sup>12</sup>

The women of East Stoughton also played a significant part in the war effort. Throughout the conflict they sent articles in large bundles to the Sanitary Commission, the nineteenth century counterpart of today's Red Cross. These packages included bandages, knitted articles, food, paper, pencils, etc. The women also participated in several Sanitary Fairs, bazaars that sold homemade items and donated the proceeds to the care of sick and wounded soldiers.

During the war East Stoughton, like most communities, sponsored a Home Guard to protect against Confederate invasion or infiltration. Its first commander was Charles M. Packard, and before entering the army himself, he led a group of about forty townsmen. They drilled occasionally, and their ranks were often filled by men either just leaving for, or just returning from, the army.

After making sure that the East Stoughton Home Guard was well organized, young Packard entered the Union army as a cavalryman. He served as a sergeant in the First Massachusetts Cavalry, and in 1864 was transferred to the Fourth Massachusetts, where he saw a good deal of fighting and was taken prisoner of war by the Confederates. While in the enemy's hands he was robbed of his clothes and subjected to some harsh treatment, but he survived the war and returned home to the village in the summer of 1865.

Back in East Stoughton young Packard was made a village constable, usually a ticket to a long life with little professional inconvenience. Shortly after his appointment, however, Constable Packard was sent to arrest a fugitive named Moran, who was reportedly holed up in a house on Pratt Street. Packard had just announced himself at the door when Moran drew a gun and began shooting, and Charles M. Packard fell dead. Twenty-three years later his friends in the village were organizing a chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic, and Post No. 193 was named for the young veteran.<sup>13</sup>

The town of Stoughton held regular "war meetings," at which recruitment matters were discussed. In early August 1862, the town was concerned about meeting its quota of enlistees, and it voted to pay a bounty of \$150 to any man who joined the ranks. To make the offer more attractive, another \$50 was promised to anyone who enlisted before August 20. It was soon after agreed to permanently raise the bounty for enlistment to \$200 per man.<sup>14</sup>

In order to raise the money necessary to pay bounties, all of Stoughton's legal voters were divided up into teams, consisting of from fifteen to twenty men each. Team members were responsible for raising money from among local businesses and professional men, and each team was required to sponsor one soldier during each



recruitment cycle.

At one of these war meetings in the summer of 1862, Oramel B. Scofield, a 44 year-old East Stoughton carpenter, stepped forward to speak. *I am but a humble individual, he said, but my life perhaps is as sweet to me as yours is to you. I take it in my hand. I go to fight for the stars and stripes. I love them. I have only one son; he, too, will go. We will fight side by side. If we fall, be assured we fall like men. Will others do likewise?*

Oramel Scofield, with 18 year-old Lucien by his side, enlisted in Company F of the 40th Massachusetts Regiment. With at least ten other East Stoughton men, they were mustered into Federal service on September 3, 1862 and sent to Washington, D.C. The company saw its first combat in front of Fort Wagner, South Carolina, and it remained in the Charleston area from August through November 1863.

After duty in Florida in the winter of 1864, the 40th Mass. returned to Virginia in time to participate in the battle of Drury's Bluff on May 16. Here the regiment lost ten killed, forty-two wounded and twenty-two missing. The Union advance and subsequent withdrawal were so fast that the dead and most of the wounded were left behind.

It was at Drury's Bluff that Thomas Cosgrove, an East Stoughton private in Company F, earned the Congressional Medal of Honor. His citation notes that he "Individually demanded and received the surrender of seven armed Confederates concealed in a cellar, disarming them and marching them in as prisoners of war." 15

The 40th Massachusetts remained in Virginia and saw spirited combat at both Cold Harbor and Petersburg. In March 1865 it was positioned along the Richmond front and was one of the first Union regiments to enter the city after the Confederate evacuation. The 40th was in camp near Richmond when the war ended. Its members were mustered out of the service on June 17 and arrived home on June 30, 1865.<sup>16</sup>

Sergeant Oramel Scofield was about 47 years-old when he returned to the village, the oldest East Stoughton resident to serve in the Civil

War. Homecomings, especially from war, are happy occasions, but for him this must have held little joy. Sergeant Scofield came home alone; Lucien, his only son, had died in South Carolina in October 1863, his body wracked by disease.<sup>17</sup>

There was at least one other instance where a father and son left East Stoughton in the same outfit. In September 1862, Samuel L. Crane, a 41 year-old merchant, enlisted in Company K of the 43rd Massachusetts Regiment. Beside him marched his son, S. Minot Crane, a 16 year-old who had enlisted as a drummer boy. Theirs was only a nine months' regiment, and both returned home safely in July 1863.<sup>18</sup>

Not only was S. Minot Crane the youngest village resident to enlist in the Union Army, he was the last of the original East Stoughton recruits to die. After returning from the army he lived a long and productive life as a member of the Avon school committee and deacon of the Avon Baptist Church. He was one of the charter members of the Stoughton post of the Grand Army of the Republic, and he also helped found the C.M. Packard Post 193 in Avon. He was 85 years-old when he died in February 1931.<sup>19</sup>

East Stoughton also had at least four men who served in the U.S. Navy during the Civil War. James A. Thompson was 30 years-old when he enlisted in July 1861. He was assigned as a crew member aboard the sloop *Cumberland* and was killed off Hampton Roads, Virginia when his ship engaged the *C.S.S. Virginia* (better known as the Merrimac) in a prelude to that vessel's battle with the Union ironclad *Monitor*.

William F. Lynch also served in the Navy, aboard the steamer *Rhode Island*. He died at Norfolk, Virginia on December 6, 1864, at the age of 23 years.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to Thompson and Lynch, two other East Stoughton men joined the navy, but only after they had seen combat in the Union Army. James O'Sullivan and John T. Lynch had both served with the 9th Massachusetts Regiment earlier in the war. O'Sullivan, in fact, had been severely wounded at Malvern Hill, on the Peninsula. Discharged on account of disability, he enlisted in the Navy in July

1864 and served aboard the steamers *Ohio* and *Rhode Island* before being discharged at the end of the war.<sup>21</sup>

The final large contingent of East Stoughton men left the village for war in September 1862, when the members of the 4th Massachusetts Regiment departed. Another of the nine months' regiments, the 4th Mass. saw duty at the siege of Port Hudson, as well as at Fort Bisland and at Big Bethel. Only nine of the villagers returned home in August 1863. Charles F. Packard, a private in Company D, had died of disease at the general hospital in Baton Rouge, Louisiana five months earlier.<sup>22</sup>

After 1862 the East Stoughton recruits left in two's and three's, and their enlistments were generally for shorter periods of time. Seven villagers enlisted in four different outfits from July to September 1864, and all of them were spared from harm.

One of them was Orin Whitten, an 18 year-old who joined Company I of the 42nd Massachusetts Regiment, a 100 days' outfit that saw service in Louisiana during the summer and fall of 1864. Little did young Whitten know that one day he would serve as a sad reminder of how times change. On July 10, 1910 - exactly forty-six years after enlisting in the Civil War - Whitten was struck and killed by a truck as he alighted from a streetcar in Mattapan Square.<sup>23</sup>

By the spring of 1865 the Confederates had suffered and lost all that they had to lose. When General Robert E. Lee surrendered his Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox Courthouse on the ninth of April, a tremendous cheer, followed by a long sigh of relief, swept across the Northern states. This meant that the boys were coming home at last.

The Civil War scarred America like no war before or since. More than 500,000 of her best young men lay beneath the soil at Antietam, Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, the Wilderness and dozens of lesser known places. The once rich, verdant countryside of the South was devastated, as were many of its cities. A new generation of American heroes was born, and some of the social problems which came of the war are with us still.

Stoughton and its village to the east had good reason to be proud of the part they played in defending the Union. The town had expended almost \$80,000 to prosecute the war and had never once failed to meet its quota of men for the service. Stoughton, including East Stoughton, sent at least 530 men to the Union Army and Navy, fifteen as commissioned officers. Seventy-five of them never returned.<sup>24</sup>

When word of Jefferson Davis' capture reached East Stoughton on May 20, 1865, the village celebrated mightily. That evening the employees of E.D. Littlefield's shoe factory assembled in present-day Goeres Square and blew up a keg of gun powder. By the light of a burning tar barrel a straw dummy identified as Jeff Davis was left hanging in the breeze as the villagers walked quietly toward their homes after the festivities.<sup>25</sup>

This must have been a welcome diversion for the small village, but what lingered was the great sense of loss. Abraham Lincoln, much beloved in East Stoughton, had been dead just over a month, and the great jubilation over the war's end had been replaced by the realization that neither the President nor the sixteen village men who had died would be there to enjoy the peace.

On July 1, 1865 William H. Wood, editor of the *Stoughton Sentinel*, eloquently summed up the feelings of his fellow townsmen when he wrote: *Oh, how great has been the sacrifice! We can scarcely comprehend it. We read the figures, with comparatively little astonishment at their large number, but as we look around among friends, and see here one, and another's place vacant, and asking the cause we hear in reply "died in the service of his country," in many, many families in our own town, and in every town throughout the land, then do we begin to realize the horror and devastation of cruel war. These may not come back, but their memories will live in the hearts of all who knew them ....*<sup>26</sup>

## NOTES

1. *Taunton Daily Gazette*, November 8, 1860. The vote in Stoughton was 485 votes for Lincoln, 215 for Douglas, 8 votes for Breckenridge, and 57 for Bell. Lincoln carried Norfolk County with

8,864 votes, 2,065 more than the combined total of his opponents. The same held true in the election of 1864.

2. *North Bridgewater Gazette*, March 18, 1861; April 11, 1861.

3. *North Bridgewater Gazette*, April 30, 1861.

4. The Stoughton figure comes from *Personal War Sketches*, A. St. John Chambre Post No. 72, *Grand Army of the Republic*, Stoughton, Mass., now in the collection of the Stoughton Historical Society. The East Stoughton information comes from *Personal War Sketches*, Charles M. Packard Post No. 193, *Grand Army of the Republic*, Avon, Mass., now in the collection of the Avon Historical Society; hereinafter cited as *Personal War Sketches*.

5. Adjutant General of Massachusetts, *Massachusetts Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines in the Civil War* (Norwood, Mass.: The Norwood Press, 1932), IV, 616; hereinafter cited as *Mass. Soldiers, Sailors and Marines*. The individual service records of the East Stoughton men can be found in these eight volumes as well as in Avon, Massachusetts, *Twelfth Annual Report of the Receipts and Expenditures of the Town of Avon, for the Year Ending December 31, 1899* (Randolph, Mass.: Randolph Register and Holbrook News, Daniel Huxford, Publisher, 1900), pp. 102-15; hereinafter cited as *Avon Twelfth Annual Report*.

6. *Mass. Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines*, III, 209, 210; IV, 805.

7. *Mass. Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines*, I, 735-36.

8. *Mass. Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines*, I, 810, 791; *Avon Twelfth Annual Report*, pp. 108, 112.

9. *Mass. Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines*, II, 1-2; *Avon Twelfth Annual Report*, p. 108.

10. William Schouler, *A History of Massachusetts in the Civil War* (Boston: By the Author, 1871), II, 522-24.

11. *North Bridgewater Gazette*, July 9, 1861.

12. *North Bridgewater Gazette*, Sept. 25, 1861; Lorch Scrapbooks, Avon Historical Society.
13. *Personal War Sketches*, Avon Post No. 193; Lorch Scrapbooks, Avon Historical Society.
14. Schouler, II, 523; *North Bridgewater Gazette*, August 6, 1862.
15. *Personal War Sketches*, Avon Post No. 193, p. 44. Cosgrove, a 42 year-old farmer, had been born in Ireland. His Medal of Honor was not awarded until November 7, 1896, when he would have been 76 years-old. Little is known of him either before or after the war, and he is apparently not buried in Avon.
16. *Mass. Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines*, IV, 106-07.
17. *Mass. Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines*, IV, 133.
18. *Mass. Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines*, IV, 266; *Avon Twelfth Annual Report*, p. 105.
19. *The Stoughton News-Sentinel*, February 26, 1931.
20. *Mass. Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines*, VIII, 332; *Avon Twelfth Annual Report*, p. 112.
21. *Avon Twelfth Annual Report*, p. 107.
22. *Mass. Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines*, I, 224.
23. *Personal War Sketches*, Avon Post No. 193.
24. Schouler, II, 523; *Personal War Sketches*, Stoughton Post No. 72, p. 260.
25. *Stoughton Sentinel*, May 20, 1865.
26. *Stoughton Sentinel*, July 1, 1865.