

53rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry

Company C

"The Sentinel" December 2024

Newsletter of The James Creek Guards



"Clubs Are Trumps!"

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I am always looking for newsletter content, so please forward your articles, book reviews, event summaries & photos, stories, etc.) to me for inclusion in a future edition of "The Sentinel". – Matthew Steger, editor

UPCOMING EVENTS

7 December – 53rd PVI Annual Meeting – Starting at 9AM sharp at Mark Fasnacht's home in Kleinfeltersville, we will discuss the 2024 season, unit business, elections, the treasurer's report, the 2025 schedule, some bylaws updates, and other unit business as well as collecting 2025 dues/party money. Please arrive by 8:45AM and bring something to share with your pards for lunch afterwards. Please let Mark know (1.) if you are attending and (2.) what you plan to bring for lunch. It is important that all members attend this meeting.

DID HAWAII PLAY A ROLE IN THE CIVIL WAR? YES, IT DID

Clay Hoffman, August 26, 2024, blueandgrayeducation.org



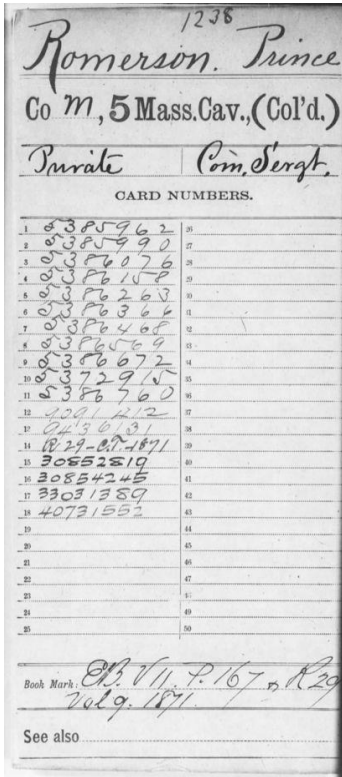
Nineteenth-century artwork depicting the CSS Shenandoah, on which Hawaiians and Hawaiian-born Americans served | U.S. Naval Historical Center

The "Hawaii Sons of the Civil War" were a group of approximately 119 Native Hawaiians and Hawaii-born men who served bravely in the Civil War. Despite King Kamehameha IV declaring the Kingdom of Hawaii's neutrality at the outset of the war, many Native Hawaiians and Hawaii-born Americans, both abroad and in the islands, enlisted in the Union and Confederacy. These men included sailors on whaling

ships who joined the Union Navy, as well as sailors who were captured by the Confederate Navy. Some of the latter served on the CSS *Shenandoah*, which is famously known for firing the last shot of the Civil War across the bow of a whaler near the Aleutian Islands.

Among the Hawaii Sons of the Civil War was Prince Romerson, a native of the Big Island of Hawaii, who enlisted in the Union Navy in 1863. It is not known if his first name denoted any royal status. Romerson served aboard the USS *Wamsutta* and USS *Mercedita*, both gunboats that supported the Union blockade of Confederate waterways.

After a year in the Navy, he joined the Union Army as a private in Company M of the 5th Regiment Massachusetts Colored Volunteer Cavalry. Promoted to the rank of sergeant on June 1, 1864, he fought with the 5th USCC until the war's end, seeing action in the Siege of Petersburg and other battles.



In 1867, Romerson enlisted in the 39th U.S. Infantry Regiment at the reduced rank of private. The 39th was later consolidated with the 40th to create the 25th U.S. Infantry, which became one of the regiments of the Buffalo Soldiers. Romerson served in the 25th for three years, fighting in the Indian Wars on the Texas frontier. He died on March 30, 1872, in his early 30s, and was buried at San Antonio National Cemetery.

Native Hawaiians had served in American wars since the War of 1812. At the beginning of the Civil War, there was a rising tide of sympathy among Hawaiians with the Union due to their historic ties to New England, established through missionaries and the whaling industry. Additionally, many people in the islands opposed slavery.

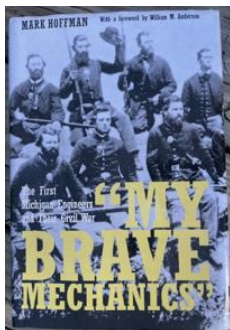
In recent years, Hawaiian residents and historians, along with descendants of the combatants, have worked to bring attention to the heroics of the Hawaii Sons of the Civil War. On August 26, 2010—the anniversary of the signing of the Neutrality Proclamation—a bronze plaque honoring them was erected at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu.

Enlistment card for Prince Romerson | public domain



Memorial plaque for Hawaii Sons of the Civil War in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, Honolulu | CC

BOOK REVIEW: MY BRAVE MECHANICS – THE FIRST MICHIGAN ENGINEERS AND THEIR CIVIL WAR



Author – Mark Hoffman

Reviewed by Mike Espenshade

Hardcover; 2007, Wayne State University Press; 331 pp text; 26 pictures, 6 maps; 5 Tables; 2

Appendices; 101 pp notes, 38 pp bibliography and index. \$46.99 bought at Stones River Battlefield NPS Visitor Center.

Historian Mark Hoffman offers readers a detailed account of the Michigan Engineers from a wealth of sources, including letters, diaries, regimental papers, newspapers, military orders, and postwar accounts. As little has been written about Union volunteer engineers in the Western Theater, their unique history is fascinating reading. This deeply researched and well-described history shares the vast amount of

hard construction work (mostly from standing timber), hard marching, and sometimes hard fighting which can cause the reader to often feel their exhaustion.

The First Michigan Engineers regiment recruited in 1861 volunteer skilled artisans, craftsmen, railroad men, and engineers whose behind-the-scenes work was crucial to the Union victory. Responsible for getting the Union Army across waterways and positioned to engage the enemy (and then keep themselves supplied) for Generals Buell, Rosecrans, Grant, Thomas and Sherman) the engineers constructed and repaired a staggering number of bridges, pontoon boats and planking, blockhouses, fortifications, railroads, warehouses, and telegraph lines.

Although they were charged primarily with engineering work, the regiment also saw substantial direct combat actions - always outnumbered - such as at LaVergne during the Battle of Stones River. Confederate guerillas and cavalry often struck quickly and sometimes at night exploiting the isolation and vulnerability of the workmen who, unlike regular infantrymen, were almost never dug in and ready for an attack. Yet, despite the odds against them, the Michigan engineers are recognized for several key accomplishments, including keeping the railroads open from Louisville and Nashville for the operations around Chattanooga and their destruction of Rebel railroads and bridge-building/corduroy road construction for Sherman's infantry and wagons during the march through Georgia and the Carolinas.

I highly recommend this book for its enlightening aspect of the little known but arduous efforts to bring timber from the woods, maintain sawmills, build trestled bridges for railroad, wagon, and infantry/artillery traffic. The author includes ample information of the officers and men of this unit, including the politics involved in this relatively new aspect to modern warfare.

The author provides tables describing the ages, length of service, etc. of the men who volunteered. However, he disappointed me in that his maps are few, crude, and they do not properly support the narrative. His dates of events being described in the narrative are sometimes elusive. He does not summarize crucial unit statistics of casualties, prisoners (they lost more than a few), number of bridges/blockhouses/saw mills built/repared, miles of railroad repaired, miles of railroad destroyed, buildings built, etc. etc.

TWO COMPANY A BOYS FROM POTTSTOWN

By: Mike Snyder

Memorial Day 2017

Up until last Saturday this month's article was going to be a continuation of the history of Pottstown industry. But that morning I bought a small American flag from veterans, members of the American Legion post in Saratoga, who were collecting contributions at the WaWa on High St.

Walking back to the car with flag in hand, the question was "what to do with it?" It wasn't until midway through a second glass of iced tea at the Ice House Restaurant that a light bulb lit up inside my head. Monday was Memorial Day, a holiday created in the aftermath of the Civil War to commemorate the hundreds of thousands of men who died in it. Just a few blocks up the street was the Pottstown Cemetery where more than 150 veterans of this war are buried. There an unmarked veteran's grave could be found, and that would be the perfect spot for the tiny flag.

It didn't take long to find one. Barely fifteen feet west of the, now unused, Charlotte Street gate is a family burial lot purchased by Thomas Jefferson Graham. On that lot is a modest monument with a square base topped by a square column, with the names of family members buried there Inscribed on its sides.

On the west face are carved the names of two of Graham's sons, Eli and William, with their birth and death dates. However they aren't buried there. The Graham brothers were killed in combat during the Civil War and are buried in Virginia.

Only thirteen months separated them in age. William was born Feb. 12, 1839 and Eli on St. Patrick's Day, 1840. They were born in Warwick in Chester County, where their father was the director of the public schools in that township and adjoining Union Twp. In Berks Co.

Sometime before 1860 the brothers left their parents' home and struck out on their own. Eli came to Pottstown where he began learning the miller's trade at the mill of Henry Gable. (Gable owned the Pottstown roller mill on the west side of Hanover St. and lived in the house that stood on the north side of it. The house is gone, but the mill, now an apartment building, still stands.) William cannot be found in Pottstown in the 1860 census, but it seems unlikely that he was very far from Eli.

On Sept. 18, 1861 Eli and William enlisted in Pottstown in a volunteer infantry company that was going to serve for three years in the Civil War. That organization became Company A of the 53rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry Regiment, which would be commanded by Pottsgrove Township native, John Rutter Brooke.

The 53rd was attached to the Army of the Potomac. It was an outfit that, during the course of its four years, fought in innumerable battles and skirmishes. To come out of the war unscathed as a member of that unit was miraculous.

Unfortunately, Eli Graham didn't have an angel sitting on his shoulder. He has the melancholy distinction of being the first soldier from Pottstown killed in combat during the Civil War. He was shot dead on June 1, 1862 in the regiment's first action, the Battle of Seven Pines, fought about seven miles east of the Confederate capital, Richmond.

His brother William wrote to his parents, "Poor Eli is dead and it is so lonesome without him, but it is God's will and we must submit." After Eli's death, William performed one final service for him. He saw to it that Eli was properly buried and his grave well marked. In 1866 the United States government created a small national cemetery about eight miles east of Richmond, where Union dead from the Seven Pines battlefield were buried. If you walk through the neatly aligned rows of headstones it soon becomes apparent that most of the men buried there are "unknown." But one of the few of the identified is Eli Graham because his brother made certain that after the battle he was buried in a well-marked grave.

Although mourning the loss of his brother, William continued soldiering with the 53rd. During the next two years he survived many of the bloody battles fought between the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia and, at some point, promoted to the rank of sergeant.

As bad as that time had been, once the two armies went after each other again May 5, 1864 the fighting went on with scarcely as pause. On June 3, 1864, two years and two days and less than ten miles from where Eli fell, Sgt. William H. Graham was mortally wounded at the Battle of Cold Harbor. A rebel bullet severed the femoral artery in his left leg and he died soon after. Unfortunately, no one marked his grave

The tombstone on the Graham lot had a Civil War soldier's marker, which has, over the years, disappeared from time to time only to appear again. On Sat. morning it was missing. Now, in its place, is a tiny American flag.

LETTER FROM GEORGE SCHEETZ OF THE 53RD PVI, CO. A

Courtesy of Spared & Shared: <https://sparedshared18.wordpress.com/>

This letter was written by George Scheetz (1840-1905), the son of John Scheetz (1818-1857) and Anna Catherine Sands (1815-1886) of Pottstown, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.

George Scheetz enlisted on 21 April 1861 with Co. C, 4th Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers. Upon the expiration of his term, he re-enlisted as a corporal with Co. A, 53rd Pennsylvania Volunteers. It was while serving with the 53rd Pennsylvania that George wrote this letter, just after the Peninsula Campaign while bivouacked at Harrison's Landing on the James River. Late in 1862, at the Battle at Fredericksburg, George was severely wounded and lay on the battlefield until being rescued at night. His wounds were severe enough to cause his discharge from the regiment on 10 March 1863 as a sergeant.

Prior to the battle at Gettysburg, George enlisted in the emergency regiment 26th Pennsylvania, serving as a 2d Sergeant. His regiment met in battle with General Ewell's troops on June 26 and pushed back to Harrisburg. During all of this time, he was still suffering from his wound. Finally in the summer of 1864, he enlisted with the 197th Regiment—a 100-day unit—serving as 1st Sergeant.

TRANSCRIPTION

Harrison Point Landing, Va.

July 6, 1862

Dear Cousin,

I received your letter and was very much pleased for to hear from you that you are all well as I am the same. I expect when the news reached Pottstown that the army had fallen back from Fair Oaks, it caused quite an excitement but it is for our own good for it is thought that the Rebels have a much stronger force there than what our Head Commander was aware of. Therefore we were obliged for to retreat until we have reinforcements or else be defeated in the attempt to take Richmond. ¹ Before our rear guard left Fair Oaks, they burnt up all that we could not get along. We had to set fire to a large pile of crackers, sugar, meat, &c. which would have fed 75,000 men for 7 days. And [besides that], a large lot of clothing had to be burnt for to prevent them from falling into the wrong hands of the Rebels. ² But enough of this.

As you have heard of our regiment being in another battle, I will give you some little account of the fights. The first battle that took place in our rear on the retreat was about 1½ miles below Fair Oaks to the left of the Richmond and Yorktown Railroad. The enemy come close to us before any firing was done on any side. At length they made their appearance out of the woods, driving our skirmishers in to the reserve, when at once grape & canister was poured into them making them run in all directions. But they formed again and marched up in

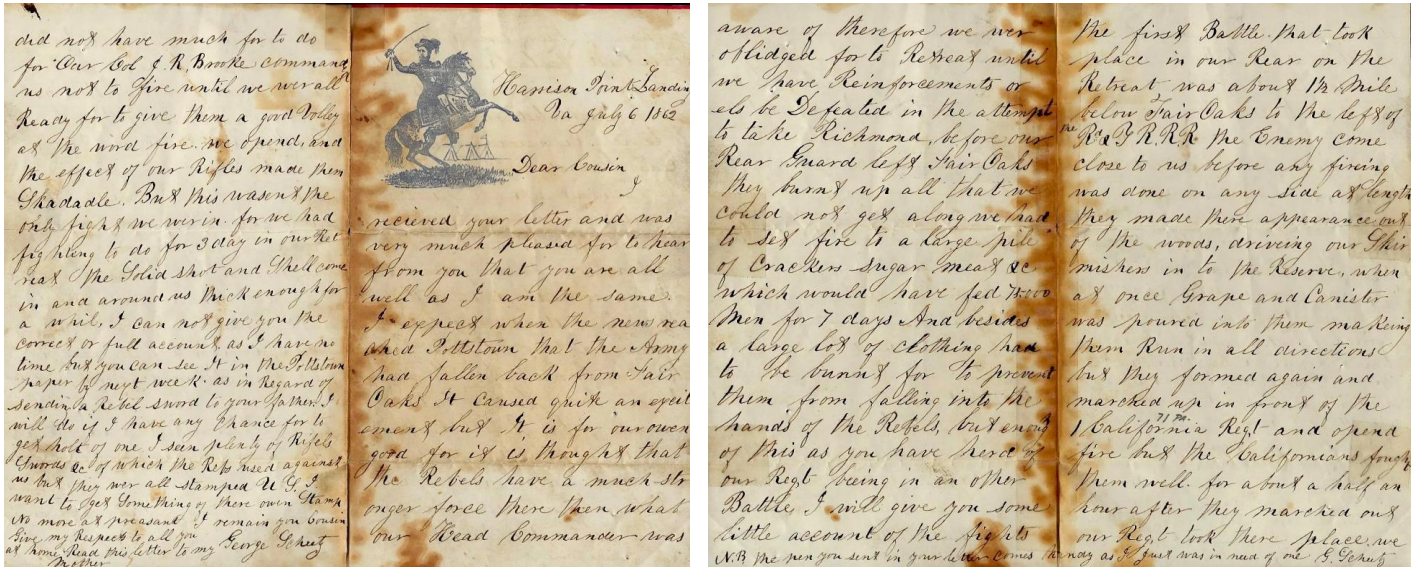
front of the 1st California Regt. [71st Pennsylvania] and opened fire. But the Californians fought them well for about a half an hour. After they marched out, our regiment took their place. We did not have much for to do for our Colonel J[ohn] R. Brooke commanded us not to fire until we were all ready for to give them a good volley. At the word, "fire," we opened and the effect of our Rifles made them skedaddle. But this wasn't the only fight we were in for we had fighting to do for 3 days. In our retreat, the solid shot and shell came in and around us thick enough for awhile. I can not give you the correct or full account as I have no time but you can see it in the Pottstown paper by next week.

As in regard of sending a Rebel sword to your father, I will do [it] if I have any chance for to get hold of one. I seen plenty of rifles, swords, &c. of which the Rebs used against us but they were all stamped U. S. I want to get something of their own stamp. No more at present. I remain your cousin. Give my respects to all at home. Read this letter to my mother. — George Scheetz

N. B. The pen you sent in your letter comes in handy as I just was in need of one. — G. Scheetz

¹ The Fifty-third's first major battle was at the [Battle of Fair Oaks](#) on June 1, 1862. Sent into the middle of the battle, the regiment was temporarily disorganized, but was still able to drive back the Confederates. Ninety-six men killed, wounded, and missing during the battle, including Major Yeager, who was killed.

² George is probably referring to the large quantity of stores stockpiled at Savage's Station by McClellan's supply line that were destroyed by Union troops as they retreated to keep it from falling into the Rebels hands.



IN MEMORY OF OUR DEPARTED PARDS

In October, the 53rd PVI lost two its own: Stu Richards and Croce Volpe. Both were well loved by their fellow pards and each will be sorely missed. Your editor (Matt Steger) and Kerry Williard attended Croce's viewing and funeral mass on Wednesday November 13th at St. David's Church in Willow Grove on behalf of the 53rd.

REMEMBRANCE DAY PARADE

On Sat. November 16th, the NR held its annual meeting which was followed by Dress Parade and the Remembrance Day Parade through the southern half of town and ending near the Bryan House. Eric Ford and Matt Steger (your editor) represented the 53rd at the meeting. Ryan Orris and Matt Steger (your editor) marched in the parade representing the 53rd. Afterwards, I visited the 53rd's monument on Brooke Ave.



3rd Company –
ELF (53rd PVI, 1st
MD, 3rd MD, and
7th PA Reserves)



QUARTERMASTER UPDATE

The unit recently acquired quite a few items to add to our quartermaster inventory including leathers, uniform clothing (including a 95th PVI jacket), etc. I've sold several items already; the updated list can be found at 53rd PVI's website under the "Equipment" tab (link is about halfway down the page): <http://www.53rdpvi.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/53rd-Quartermaster-List-updated-Sept.-18-2024.pdf>. I will plan on bringing some of the items to our annual meeting in December although if you are interested in an item from the list, let me know ahead of time to ensure that I bring that item.

2025 DUES AND PARTY COST

Per our bylaws, 2025 unit dues are due to me by December 31st. Cost is \$40/man, of which, \$10 covers your liability insurance through the NR insurance policy. I will be collecting 2025 dues AND the annual holiday party/dinner money at the annual meeting on Sat. 7 December. Pete will provide the party info at the meeting; cost is \$30/person. All checks get made payable to "53rd PVI"; if mailing your check, I will email you to let you know once it's been received. Paying for your dues and party in a single check is encouraged.

THE CIVIL WAR MERCHANT

(if you have something for sale or are looking for something, email me to include it in a future edition of "The Sentinel")

For Sale –

(1.) I have a C&D Jarnagin size 46 federal enlisted frock coat for sale. Still in great condition. Email me with any questions/inquiries: n3ntj@outlook.com

(2.) Kerry Williard is handling the sale of Dave Swigert items for Dave's wife. Marc and I assembled an inventory list with approximate values. Some items remain. The list is current as of 21 July 2023. Contact Kerry directly with any and all inquiries: shamokin71@aol.com (see the updated list below)

Uniform Clothing	Item Description	Detailed Description	Price
1	Trouser - Steel Blue each with suspendors	34 min waist/27" inseam-avg. condx and a little dirt w/ braces no watch pck	\$25.00
1	Dk Blue Vest Size 42	3 pockets - light wear	\$20.00
1	Colored Pattern Shirt	blue plaid with white china buttons - sun faded - good condx	\$10.00
1	White muslin Shirt	19" at shoulder 14" neck - very short in body length	\$5.00
1	White muslin Shirt	20" at shoulder 16" neck - very short in body length - cuffs are stained	\$5.00
1 pair	Woolen Grey Gloves	modern - right hand is fingerless	\$2.00
1	Underpants - Night Pants - White	36" waist - knee stains - 25" inseam white muslin - rear repair	\$3.00
1	Lt Brown Scarf - Acrylic - Modern		\$1.00
1	Havelock - White - VG condx		\$2.00
3 pairs	Grey Wool Socks - Modern		\$2.00/pr
2	Hats - Union & Confederate for children		\$1.00
Accoutrements			
1	Scabbord - Late war 7 Rivet		\$15.00
1	Gum Blanket	some cracking with oversized grommets	\$20.00
1	Shelter Tent - Both Halves - Heavy Canvas w/Loops w/Mildew		\$35.00
1	Bag of 7 wooden Tent Stakes w/Rope		\$3.00
1	Grey Smooth Face Canteen - Leather Sling Satinette Cover w/ Corded Stopper		\$20.00
1	Haversack - Tarred Black - Brittle Strap w/opwn seam		\$5.00
1	Haversack - Tarred Black w/Liner - Paint peeling Holes @ Strap Connection		\$10.00
1	Grey Smooth Face Canteen - Leather Sling Satinette Cover w/ Corded Stopper		\$20.00
Misc Items			
1 can	sno-seal (half full)		\$1.00
1	Wood Mirror - Haversack filler	sliding cover	\$3.00
1	Wood Comb - Haversack filler		\$1.00
1	Wooden button board		\$1.00
2	Coin Purses - Made from Tic Material		\$1.00/ea
1	Bag with Coffee	brown coffee	\$1.00/ea
1	shoe lace - undied		\$0.25/ea
2	Soap Bar		\$1.00/ea
6 1/2	Wax Candles		\$0.25/ea
1	pocket sharpenig stone	new	\$2.00
1	box rifle cleaning kit	pads, steel wool, rags, etc	\$5.00
3	match boxes w/ matches		\$0.25/ea
1 Pair	shoe tree		\$3.00
1	Green Army Duffle Bag		\$3.00
1	drawers for use as patches		\$1.00
Armaments			
1	1861 Springfield Rifle - Armi Sport		\$900.00

2024 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

13 January - Holiday Party - Dobbin House
10 February - Winter Drill - Landis Valley (note the new date!!)
2~3 March – NR School Of Instruction - Gettysburg
6~7 April - NR Camp of Instruction - Gruber Wagon Works (Federal Alliance)*
4~5 May - 160th Wilderness: Spotsylvania Court House, VA*
4 May - POSA Living History - Robeson, PA
18 May - Lancaster Cemetery Flag-in event
27 May - Hummelstown Memorial Day Parade **53rd MAX EFFORT**
20~21 July - Landis Valley Civil War Days **53rd MAX EFFORT**
14~15 Sept. - Gettysburg Living History - PA Monument **53rd MAX EFFORT**
19~20 Oct. - 160th Cedar Creek - Middletown, VA*
16 Nov. - Remembrance Day – Gettysburg, PA
7 Dec. – 53rd PVI Annual Meeting **53rd MAX EFFORT**
**NR max effort events*



For updated event info and other news, please check out the Facebook pages of the 53rd PVI and/or the National Regiment (links below) and check your email on a regular basis

53rd PVI Contacts President: Eric Ford (reenactor53@gmail.com)
Vice President: Pete Zinkus (zinkusp@gmail.com)
Treasurer/Secretary: Matthew Steger (n3ntj@outlook.com)
Newsletter Editor: Matthew Steger (n3ntj@outlook.com)
Webmasters: Steve Dillon (steve@gofoxpro.com) and Matthew Steger (n3ntj@outlook.com)
53rd PVI Website: <http://www.53rdpvi.org>
2024 Field Officers - Sergeants: Matthew Steger (1st) & Marc Benedict
Corporals: Mike Espenshade (1st) & Michael Brumbaugh
53rd PVI Facebook Page: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/53rdPVI>
National Regiment Phone line: 800-777-1861 (code 61)
National Regiment Website: <https://www.thenationalregiment.com>
National Regiment Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/842904089142263>

