



Thompson Historical Society Spring Newsletter

President's Quill By Joe lamartino



Inside this issue:

President's Quill	1
Treatment of Union Prisoners	2
The Last Green Valley	7
Soldiers of Thompson Book Released	7

The funding for the roof of the museum did not get approved by the voters of Thompson. Though the building served as the town's library for 80+ years, and the building was GIVEN to the town by benefactors, this generation couldn't find the will to fund a new roof.

Back in 1967, the Old Town Hall was in disrepair and was due to be dismantled. A group of Thompson residents banded together and formed the Thompson Historical Society and, taking the building from the town, proceeded to restore the venerated structure. Fifty years later, we are faced with a similar situation with the old library building. If the roof fails, we will lose the building and that would be a disgrace. To allow a beautiful donated building to fall to pieces is simply shameful.

We have asked the town to consider a new plan to save the old building from neglect. If the historical society takes control of the building, we will find a way to replace that roof. Never

doubt what a group of dedicated volunteers can accomplish. I don't remember who said it first but it is so true. We hope you will support us if we can organize a suitable building transfer plan acceptable to the town.

June 4 1890

The daily papers of May 29 contained the following:

“William Benoit has skipped out of North Grosvenordale taking with him over \$100 belonging to a local baseball club, the proceeds of a recent fair. He was a newsdealer and had been doing quite an extensive business. He drove to Massachusetts Sunday morning and got Sunday papers; these he peddled all the way down the road to Danielsonville. He is a Frenchman, tall, slim, dark, about 22 years old.”



Volume VI # 8 - Webster Times - May 7, 1864

TREATMENT OF UNION PRISONERS

The ensuing official document is an important report of Lieut. Col. Monroe Nichols, of the 18th Reg. Conn. Vols. made to the House Military Committee, at their request. It sets the mooted question of rebel humanity completely to rest, and we bespeak for it an attentive reading.

Thompson Conn. March 21, 1864

Maj. Gen. Srenk,

Chairman of the House Military Committee.

Sir;-You have requested me to communicate for the use of the committee of which you are chairman, whatever facts I may have respecting the treatment received by Union prisoners held in Richmond.

I was nine months a prisoner, and for many weeks an inmate of the Libby Hospital. Here from August until December, I had an opportunity of obtaining accurate information as to the condition of our sick and wounded whether officers or privates. The results on my observations up to that time, I can no way present more truthfully than in adopting a report published by Dr. Meeker and other surgeons, who were confined a long time with me in the same hospital, and who were released near the last of November. That report was drawn up by me at their request, before their departure, that they might take with them a statement that should express, not their opinion alone, but an opinion that could be endorsed by all the officers in the hospital.. The report referred to was as follows:

“We have enjoyed for several months daily access to the hospital where the sick and wounded among the union prisoners received treatment, and we hereby declare our belief that since the arrival of the Chickamauga prisoners the number of deaths per day has averaged fifty, the most prevalent diseases being those of the respiratory and digestive organs. Of late the percentage of deaths has greatly increased, the result of causes that have been long at work, as insufficient food, clothing and shelter, com-

bined with that depression of spirits brought on so surely by ill treatment and long confinement.

It may seem almost incredible when we affirm that, in the three hospitals for Union soldiers, the average mortality is now forty five per day; and from what seems to us reliable information, we are forced to believe that the deaths in the tobacco factories and upon the island, will raise the average mortality, totally, to sixty per day, or eighteen hundred monthly. As a probable estimate of the number of sick men, we must conclude, judging from the extremely reduced condition of those received into the hospital, particularly from the island, that hundreds quite sick are left behind, who would be considered by us to be fit subjects for hospital treatment.

We can reasonably estimate the number who should be, but are not, admitted to hospitals, at five hundred. Thirteen hundred we know are now registered as patients, and the confederate surgeons themselves say that the number of patients is only limited by the scanty accommodations provided. In fact, over ten percent of the whole number of prisoners held by the rebels have been reduced to the condition of sick men., who require skillful and assiduous attention. Yet, in the essential matter of rations, they are receiving corn bread and sweet potatoes. Meat is now only furnished occasionally to any class of prisoner, and all sick or well officers or privates are furnished with a poor article of corn bread, in lieu of wheat bread.

We ask if this is proper food for hospital patients, prostrated with dysentery and fever, to say nothing of the balance of prisoners? Startling instances of individual suffering, and horrid pictures of death from prostrating sickness and starvation, we have had thrust upon our attention. The first demand of the poor creatures from the island was always for food, and we have seen them die clutching the half eaten crust. Self respect gone, all hope and ambition gone, half clad and covered with vermin and filth, many of them when received are beyond the reach of medical skill.

In one instance the ambulance brought sixteen men to the hospital, and during the night seven had died; again eighteen were brought and eleven died within twenty four hours; at another time fourteen were ad-

mitted and during the night ten of the number died. It is not an unfrequent occurrence for the sick to die in the ambulance before reaching the hospital. Judging from what we have ourselves seen, we do not hesitate to say that under a treatment of systematic abuse, neglect, and semi starvation, the number who are becoming permanently broken down in constitution must be reckoned by thousands. The confederate daily papers in general acknowledge the truth of all we have affirmed, but generally close their abusive editorials by declaring that even such treatment is better than the invading Yankees deserve.

The Examiner, in a recent article, begrudges even the little food the prisoners did receive, and the few boxes sent to the officers from home, and closed by commending the system of semi starvation and exposure as well calculated to dispose of us. Recently several hundred prisoners per day were removed to Danville. In two instances we were standing by as the ranks filed past. It was a sad sight to see the attenuated forms, sharp features and pallid faces of the men who a few months since were robust in vigor of health. Numbers were without shoes, nearly all without blankets or overcoats, and not a man did we see who was well or carefully clad. All this is true, yet cold weather is hardly commenced. We are horrified when we picture the wholesale misery and death that must come with the biting frosts of winter.

These statements published last autumn by the surgeons referred to, apply specially to October and November, But I more than far that our men continued in the same woeful condition throughout the entire winter. The Richmond papers often alluded to the great mortality among the prisoners at Danville, and it was well known to the officers in Libby that the condition of the men on the island grew gradually worse from month to month.

To show what must be the condition of these thousands of suffering men, allow me to state the significant fact thirty three and one third percent of those received March 15th, at City Point, were, on arriving at Annapolis, immediately consigned to the hospitals to receive the delicate treatment due to sick men, and yet they were taken from the island as being comfortably healthy men, for it was expressly ordered that the sick, and feeble be left behind. Such facts as these need no embellishment of rhetoric to give them force. One has but to see these men to be convinced that in all respects they have suffers the greatest privations. Rations, clothing, fuel, shelter, all have been sadly insufficient.

On the fifth of January, the coldest weather of the season, seven hundred were without tents, and no wood was provided for two days. The only clothing issued was from the U. S. Government; but the rebel authorities refused to receive even of this a scanty supply for all. Besides so scanty were the rations that the men were impelled by ravenous hunger to barter necessary clothing for food. Richmond guards are comfortably clad in the overcoats and blankets sent from the north for Union prisoners. When recently so many officers escaped from Libby, a blue overcoat excited no suspicions. As to the supplies of food forwarded, the humane intentions of the U. S. government were in like manner defeated. Only a small portion of the quantities received were consumed by union prisoners.

Almost the entire subsistence of every class of prisoners was derived from corn bread, the only bread issued, and of this even the supply was scanty. It was made of coarse, unsifted meal, mixed with salt, in cold water, and baked hard. Meat is now furnished to the officers in Libby no oftener than once a week. In summer and fall it was furnished once a day. But the prisoners upon the island have not received a ration of meat for forty five days ending March 14. And their ration of bread was only a third, sometimes a half, of a two pound loaf. No wonder that dogs coming upon the island or into the factories were killed and eaten, a fact notorious in Richmond and often referred to in the papers.

Upon the island, where at times there were as many as eight or ten thousand prisoners, the tents for the men were poor, no straw was furnished as a bedding, and at no time were there enough to accommodate all. Vitality was so reduced by starvation that many were absolutely frozen to death, and numerous amputations of frozen toes and feet were made necessary. But it seems to be a standing regulation of the authorities to prevent the men from dying on the island; hence they are borne off, even when in a dying condition, that the officials may always be able to show but comparatively few graves in the island burial place, and yet have it to say that all who have died on the island are buried there.

It would be well so far if all who died there were decently buried there. The paroled men upon the boat declared to me by scores that only recently six corpses were placed just out of the camp by the hospital, where they lay exposed for several days until one body was almost wholly eaten by swine and dogs, and every corpse was more or less mutilated.

The destitute starving condition of our men is well known in Richmond. The facts were too palpable to be unobserved. Besides, congressmen, reporters of the press, pastors in the leading churches, and men of high position in military and civilian life, visited Libby prison and from the lips of federal officers were often obliged to hear a full recital of the wrongs suffered not by the officers alone, but by the more helpless privates, in comparison with whose suffering ours deserve no mention. But never from their congress, from the Richmond press, nor, so far as we could perceive, from the Christian pulpit, did there ever issue one indignant protest against a system of abuse, inhumanity, starvation, which the pirates of Barbary would have shuddered to practise. Yet we repeat, the facts in the case were notorious, and will stand as history never to be revised.

It was equally well known in Richmond and throughout the confederacy that the confederate prisoners in the north were well provided for; that while the union officers in Libby were confined closely within doors, in an atmosphere of stench, with an average space of four feet by seven to a man, the rebel officers upon Johnson's Island had the most comfortable quarters and acres of ground in which to exercise and enjoy the sunlight and pure air; that while we in Libby were served with half a loaf of corn bread per day, and a gill of rice and two gills of beans per week, the rebel prisoners of every grade had the full and generous rations of the union soldier.

In one of the letters that accidentally came into Libby from Johnson's island, a rebel captain says, "we are tenderly treated and have all the privileges that prisoners of war have a right to expect." In another a Louisiana Colonel says, "Indeed, we have more than we can eat, and so we make savings of our rations, with which we buy milk, butter, eggs, ect.," At City Point I overheard a conversation between the rebel Gen Lee (son of Gen. Robert E. Lee) and Captain Sawyer, as they met and were introduced to each other. Gen. Lee said he had nothing he could complain of; that he had been well used and had suffered for nothing during his whole confinement. Captain Sawyer remarked that the Union prisoners in Richmond were obliged in truth to speak otherwise of their own case. Said Gen. Lee, "I believe it, I believe it all; it comes from so many sources I cannot doubt it. But in the field we use prisoners well.

There was a marked contrast in the relative appearance of the paroled union and confederate soldiers

that met at City Point. Ours were fit subject for hospitals, theirs were fit at once to take the field; and the government employees on the steamer New York declared that often they had overheard the paroled confederate soldiers express feelings of pity and compassion as they looked upon the sickly, starved, diseased men for whom they had been exchanged.

To aggravate the misery caused by hunger and deprivation of all comfort, there was always an abusive and malicious spirit manifested toward union prisoners. Witness the spirit of the Richmond press. I can properly denominate it fiendish, exerting all its power by abuse and misrepresentation to hound on the people and soldiers to acts of barbarity and ferocity. Civilized and Christian communities respect the dead. But read the following extract from the Richmond Examiner, a specimen, I presume of the refined sentiment of Mr. Pollard, historian of the confederacy.

Referring to the body of brave Dahlgren, it says:- "Stripped, robbed of everything valuable, the fingers cut off for the sake of the diamond rings that encircled them, when the body was found by those sent to take charge of it, it was lying in a field stark naked, with the exception of stockings. Some humane person had lifted the corpse from the pike and had thrown it over the wall to save it from the hogs. Yesterday afternoon the body was removed from the cars that brought it to the York River Depot and given to the spot of earth selected to receive it. Where the spot of earth is, no one but those concerned with its burial know or care to tell. It was a dog's burial, without coffin or winding sheet or service. Friends and relatives at the north need not inquire further; this is all that they will know."

But the malicious and unscrupulous character of the leaders at Richmond finds its fittest illustration in the audacious design formed for blowing up with gunpowder the two hundred officers in Libby prison. The evidence is strong enough to necessitate a belief that on the evening of March 1st, the prison authorities caused a large hole to be dug under the exact center of the prison, in which they deposited enough gunpowder, in their opinion to destroy the prison and its occupants. This was at the very time when Kilpatrick was so near the city, and when the firing could be distinctly heard in Libby. Many of the citizens believed that the city would be taken and the prisoners set free. One of the prison officials was heard to say "Richmond is gone up this time, sure."

The Negroes who did the work declared to us the

next morning that gunpowder had been placed there, as they thought, to blow up the prison, and they narrated circumstances which at least rendered their story plausible. During the days March 2d and 3d, several other proofs of the fact came to our knowledge, and among them was the emphatic statement of the inspector of prison, Mr. Richard Turner, that there was powder there in large quantity, "but," said he, "I did not place it there."

The officers, however, as a whole were determined to discredit it. On the evening of March 4th, Rev. Dr. Wm. A. Smith, president of Randolph and Macon College, called at the prison, and in a conversation with him at the office, I received his positive confirmation of the fact we suspected.

I may here that Dr. Smith occupies a high position before the Southern public; has been seventeen years president of one of the leading Colleges of the South, and more than any other man was the leader and champion of the Southern Methodists in the secession from the M. E. church north. On account of sickness in my family I had been induced to ask his aid in negotiating for me a special exchange. With this view he kindly called the second time to see me at the prison, having come direct, he said, from a conference with Commissioner Ould.

A long conversation ensued between us, upon the cause and conduct of the war, and upon the character of the late raid around Richmond. He stated that the people and government were greatly exasperated that severe measure would be resorted to.

The following is an extract of a memorandum made by me on returning to the quarters: He said moreover that this prison was mined, and powder was placed beneath it, that in case of an attempt to rescue us by an expedition thus conducted and likely to be successful, the prisoners in Libby would be blown to atoms. This he stated as though he had been requested to, that the prisoners through me might know how dangerous would be an attempt on their part to escape or on the part of their friends to rescue them. To my direct question whether of not he approved of that resort, he made as I remember no direct answer.

He asked me "if the officers were aware of the dangers." I replied that we had for several days' sufficient evidence to believe that powder had been placed there, but the proceedings were so horrible to think of, we had rejected all evidence, and said it could not be that the authorities would resort to a

measure so murderous and even so impolitic. I remarked that I regarded such a proceedings a high crime, not against the United States Government, but against humanity.

From this time forth evidence daily accumulated. Dr. McCabe of the Episcopal Church, and formerly of Baltimore, confirmed the same. The Richmond Inquirer of March 6, I think referred very significantly to the effectual, means prepared to prevent henceforth an escape of the officers in Libby, even if the city itself should be taken. The Whig of March 8 impliedly assumed the fact, allowing, however, that it was not exactly chivalric to resort to "Villainous gunpowder", but justified it by saying that in view of the character of the "Federal Raids" it would be puerile to talk of adhering to the rules of civilized warfare.

On the morning that we left Richmond, March 14th, Major Turner, the commandant of the prison, in conversation with two of the officers, again positively affirmed the fact above stated, and when one of the officers asked him if after all, under any circumstances, he would apply the match to it, he replied "I certainly would myself. If the Yankees take Richmond, I should be hung among the first. I might as well blow you up and go to hell with you."

On the truce steamer New York were several men who had been detailed by the rebels from among the Union prisoners as coopers and carpenters, and who had been confined in the basement of Libby, where the mine was placed. One of them I. W. Champion, Fifth Indiana cavalry declared that he saw the adjutant Latouche pace off the distances in the cellar, and say "We'll plant it about here." Four or five Negroes did the work supervised by Latouche. Champion saw the large box, like a clothing box, first fitted to the hole, and the kegs of powder were placed in soon after. Other rebel officers were coming in and out of the basement, and all were much excited. He said also, in a day or two afterwards more powder was added, and that the carpenter who made the box tube to contain the fuse was also on board the steamer; but I made no effort to find him.

I will omit to state other testimony I have on hand. But from various sources the confirmations are so strong that I have myself no doubt that the officers in Libby Prison are living over a magazine designed in a certain contingency to destroy them utterly. The great wonder in the case is that even rebel

madness is so blind as not to see the impolicy of an act that would shock the humanity of barbarians.

I have nothing further that perhaps I need offer. if there is still doubt as to the facts that I have averred, if it is believed that other officer along with myself are guilty of exaggeration, more statements can be verified by hundreds of paroled men now at Annapolis. The accounts they gave me, of their suffering from cold hunger and abuse, are heart rending, and I verily believe that when the history of Richmond prisons shall be written, no parallel will be found in the annals of war.

Why the rebel authorities thus elect to treat men, unaccused of crime, worse than any civilized government treats condemned felons, I am not called upon to discuss. I am aware the confederacy is poor and hard pressed for supplies of all kinds; but this does not justify abuse, or plots for the wholesale destruction of helpless prisoners; neither does it justify starvation, when prisoners can be so readily be paroled and sent to the land of plenty.

The conviction was forced upon us that the hardships of the prisoners were directly designed with a view to awaken sympathy and anxiety in the North that a full exchange, and on their own terms, could thus be extorted from our government. For they would not alleviate the suffering thousands themselves, or allow supplies to be furnished from Washington.

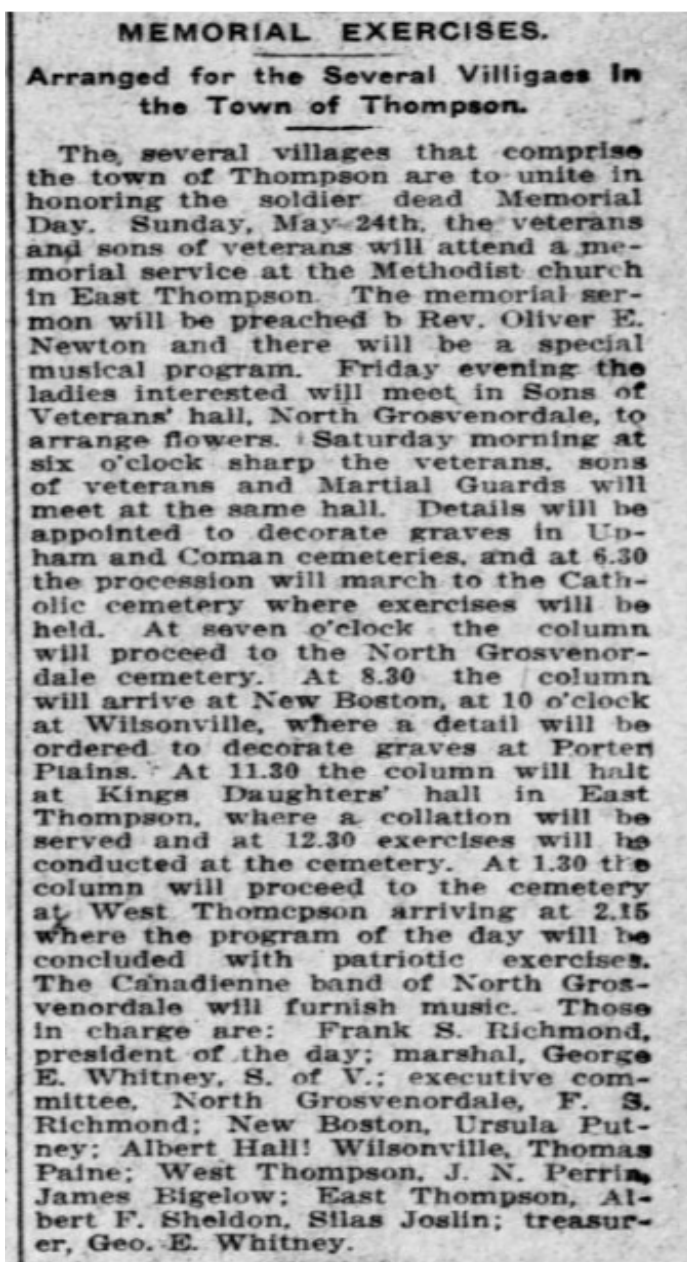
Judge Ould, more than once attempted to influence the officers to protest against the course of our government. But we were well aware that it was rebel perfidy and breach of public faith that had rendered an exchange well nigh impossible. We were not disposed to advance the interests of rebels by showing a lack of confidence in our own government.

I have written more than I intended, but you are at liberty to make such use of my statements as you may deem proper.

I am, General, respectfully yours

[Signed] Monroe Nichols

Lieut. Col. 18th Reg. C. V.



2017 BOARD OF
DIRECTORS MEETING SCHEDULE

May 17, 2017 at the ELM

June 6, 2017 Annual Meeting
Greystone Farm 6 pm Dinner
7 pm Meeting.

Soldiers of Thompson Book Released – Link Available



Quarterly Historical Collaborations in The Last Green Valley began in 2016. These events were inspired and driven by requests from local historical societies, just like [The Thompson Historical Society](#) (Joe Lindley was specifically inspirational.) They are open to anyone interested in our history.

The Last Green Valley is a 35 town National Heritage Corridor in eastern CT and south-central MA. One unique reason for this designation by Congress in 1994 was our regions history.

Many historical societies and museums face the same struggles (membership, volunteers, resources, a location, funding, technology and more), and some have found solutions. It just makes sense that we work together, got to know each other, visit each other, and share the struggles, solutions and successes.

The Last Green Valley is a destination, thanks in part to our history and our museums.

The information about these past and upcoming historical collaborations can be found at:

<http://thelastgreenvalley.org/learn-protect/historic-cultural-resources/>

The Last Green Valley's facebook page also lists out events and other news: www.facebook.com/LastGreenValley

Marcy Dawley-The Last Green Valley

A book titled *Thompson, Connecticut; Men and Women Who Served in the Armed Forces; Revolutionary War to World War II*, a project that has taken a number of years to compile, is now available at the Thompson Historical Society website. Project Manager, Joe Lindley, advises the book contains the names of soldiers, airmen, sailors and Marines from Thompson who fought or were activated for war starting with the Revolutionary War and ending with WWII. "This is a work in progress as it's difficult to find all the military records of these men and women, but I feel we are 99% the way there," states Lindley. "We did not want to lose the names we compiled over the years and we felt the best way to share this information is through a link on the THS site." That link is available at www.thompsonhistorical.org, and connects to a pdf of the current version. Any corrections, comments or additions should be sent to joelindley119@hotmail.com or by messaging us at our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/thompsonhistory.

Seventy-seven Thompsonites have died as a result of war. The 77 men will be memorialized during a ceremony being held at the Mary R. Fisher Elementary School on May 26, 2017 at 9:00. The event is open to the public.



The Thompson Historical Society
P.O. Box 47
Thompson, CT 06277
www.thompsonhistorical.org
Address Correction Requested



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July 2016-June 2017 Membership

Mail to: Thompson Historical Society
Attn: Membership
PO Box 47
Thompson CT 06277

Contributing Membership: \$25.00

Individual Membership: \$10.00

Family Membership: \$15.00

Members are invited to purchase first year memberships for new members for \$5.00

****Please Check Your Newsletter Label For Our Membership Info. See Website for More Information On Fees. ****

THS Contact Info—jiamartino@charter.net (860) 923-3776

Visit us on the web at www.thompsonhistorical.com