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Springfield During the Civil War Years,
1861-1865
Edward M. Morin

"By 1855, western Massachusetts was covered by a network of fifteen railroads," with Springfield being the main junction point. This gave Springfield a boost by making it an important freight traffic center and made it possible for the rest of western Massachusetts to participate in the blossoming industrial revolution. It "rapidly made Springfield-Westfield-Holyoke-Chicopee area an industrial complex rivaling those of Fall River-New Bedford, Lawrence-Haverhill, and the greater Boston area." Springfield textiles, paper, and machinery factories mushroomed and started to expand. By 1860, along with its plastics industry, they formed the basis for the city's economy.

Springfield, like any other community, prayed to be spared from the horrors of war. As war became a reality, it was met with great enthusiasm. W. S. Elwell, a portrait painter, summed up the feelings of the citizens a few days after Fort Sumter by stating: "Visited the street this morning and found the greatest excitement prevails. The War news — the aggression of the South has aroused the North, and to arms is the cry."

In its contributions to the war effort, Springfield did not supply any significant portion of the major leadership of the Union Army. None of her men distinguished themselves enough to gain national recognition or an important governmental post during that time. James Barnes became the highest-ranking Springfield citizen as a major general, but he was not an important field commander: One reason may be that in the years preceding the war Springfield, or for that matter the rest of Hampden County, had very little interest in military matters. In January of 1861, the Massachusetts militia numbered about 5,600 men composed of nine regiments, seven battalions, and thirteen unattached companies. Hampden County contained fifteen percent of the state's population, but provided less than one percent of the Massachusetts militia. Thus, no organized body of troops were drawn from Springfield by Governor Andrews in the first call for 75,000 volunteers. When President Lincoln called for an additional 40,000 men in May of 1861, it was met in Springfield by the organization of the Tenth Massachusetts Infantry Regiment on June 21, 1861. The Tenth was the first of four regiments composed of men from western Massachusetts in 1861, the others being the Twenty-seventh, the Thirty-seventh, and the Forty-sixth.

Since Hampden County was the most populous one in the west and Springfield was the largest city in the area, it had a great influence on the composition of those regiments. A total of 2,508 Springfield men fought in the war and out of this number only 318 paid commutation fees to the government.
In late May of 1861, the three Springfield companies of the Tenth set up camp in Hampden Park on the northern edge of the city. Later other companies from the various towns and villages joined them. There was chaos; the recruits did not know what to do and no one was in position to help them because the officers lacked military experience. They all had a romantic idea about the war and felt it would be a jolly adventure. The members of the various companies remained together, even going to church en masse with the clergymen preparing special sermons for them. 7

The Tenth's military experience included the defense of Washington from June of 1861 to the early months of 1862. Its major engagements during the war consisted of participation in McClellan's Peninsula Campaign. The regiment received its baptism of fire at Fair Oaks, Virginia. It also participated in the major engagements of the Army of the Potomac. It received its greatest losses at the battles of Malvern Hill and Cold Harbor. 8 When the regiment was mustered out in Springfield on June 24, 1864 the statistics showed its total strength to be 1,233, with 130 killed in action or died of wounds, 7 died in Confederate prisons, and 46 died of illnesses. The total loss came to 183 men or about fifteen percent, there also were 55 deserters, none came from Springfield. 9

The Twenty-seventh Regiment was organized in the early autumn of 1861 by Horace C. Lee, the city clerk of Springfield who had been active in the state militia for many years. He was granted the authority to raise a regiment from the four western counties. Lee was commissioned a colonel and placed in command of the Twenty-seventh. 10

By September 17, 1861, the companies started to arrive at the point of rendezvous, Camp Reed, located on the Wilbraham Road about a mile east of the Springfield Armory, near the present site of American International College. They left Camp Reed on November 2, 1861 and went by train to Hudson, New York. From there they took a steamer to New York City and once more boarded a train which took the regiment to Annapolis, Maryland. There they joined forces with General Burnside’s Ninth Corps. Early in 1863, they participated in Burnside’s expedition to Hatteras Inlet and Roanoke Island, North Carolina and then saw continuous duty in that state until 1863. This area is not known for its significant battles and the activity of the Twenty-seventh had little effect on the outcome of the war. But the men did participate in some heavy fighting and had a number of minor encounters for the remainder of 1863 and the early months of 1864. They then had a few months of provost duty at New Berne, North Carolina and Norfolk, Virginia. The Twenty-seventh’s active combat service resumed in early May of 1864 at the battle of Walthall’s Landing, Virginia and during the summer the regiment saw heavy fighting at Drewy’s Bluff, Cold Harbor, and Petersburg. 11 In late August it returned to North Carolina for the remainder of the war.
The men of the Twenty-seventh were generally from the western counties of the state. The most numerous concentration of Springfield men could be found in Company K. The total membership of the regiment was 1,569 officers and men. Of this number, 364 died in service, a total of about twenty-three percent. Of these, 71 were killed in action, 293 died of wounds or disease, and 48 men deserted, of whom three were from Springfield.12

The other local regiment was the Thirty-seventh, which saw more action than any other from western Massachusetts. It was organized in August of 1862 at Camp Briggs in Pittsfield. This regiment was also commanded by a Springfield man, Colonel Oliver Edwards. It was moved to New York by the same route taken by the Twenty-seventh, and from there went by train to Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington. It joined the Army of the Potomac after the battle of Antietam and after three months in camp it was initiate at the battle of Fredericksburg. The Thirty-seventh was not ordered to storm the heights, but was given the task of guarding the pontoon bridges and later covered the retreat.

For a time, the story of the Thirty-seventh was the same as the Army of the Potomac: the "Mud March," Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg, where it suffered heavy casualties. After Gettysburg the regiment was detached for guard
duty in New York City, an order related to the draft riots in mid-July of 1863. The regiment guarded the draft headquarters on the day the draft was to begin. Things proceeded well, but during the stay the Thirty-seventh experienced 47 desertions.13

The unit left New York on October 14, 1863 and rejoined the Army of the Potomac four days later. It took part in very heavy fighting in the battles of the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, and Cold Harbor.14 In early July it was ordered to the Valley of Virginia, under Sheridan, in a campaign against General Early. The Campaign ended on October 19, 1864 with the victory at Cedar Creek, in which the Thirty-seventh saw heavy fighting.15 It was ordered back to the main body of the Army of the Potomac in December and participated in the battle of Petersburg.

The total enrollment of the Thirty-seventh was 1,320, with 110 killed in action, 138 died of wounds and disease, and 87 deserted. The total loss was 238 men, about eighteen percent.16

The only other military unit which had a substantial number of Springfield men in it was the Forty-sixth Massachusetts Regiment, composed of nine months' men, recruited in October of 1862. It was briefly under the command of Colonel George Bowler, who was replaced by Colonel William S. Shurleff.17 Most of its service was spent near New Berne, North Carolina, where it arrived on November 24, 1862. The Regiment participated in various engagements along with the Twenty-seventh, but did not see much action in its short history. On its way home in June of 1863, the Forty-sixth volunteered for active duty when Lee's invasion of Maryland and Pennsylvania created a crisis. It was assigned to guard the outer defenses of the city of Baltimore. A week later it was ordered home, and eight days after its arrival in Springfield the men were mustered out. During the regiment's short history the total membership of the Forty-sixth was 965 men, of whom only one was killed in action and 32 died of wounds or diseases for a total of 33 men.18

Although the historian focusses his attention on the regiments of Western Massachusetts, it must be remembered that a fair proportion of the men were from Springfield, and they played a major role in the leadership. Altogether 2,508 Springfield residents served in the war.19

From the outset of the war, the civilian population of the country eagerly looked after the needs of the soldiers. In Springfield, as in other cities and towns throughout the country, this devotion was expressed in many ways. Parties were held and collections taken up for the soldiers before they left home, letters were written to offer some cheer as well as material comforts. Also they cared for the sick and wounded that passed through due to the brutal and savage war. To the
people of Hampden County, and especially Springfield and the surrounding towns, the work of caring for the sick and wounded became the main concern. Due to Springfield's importance as a rail center, many carloads of wounded soldiers passed through on their way home.

"The summer of 1863 witnessed the return from the service of the 9 months' regiments, many of their members suffering from disease and wounds, following the great battles of that year...the numbers of wounded and otherwise disabled were immensely increased."20 A commission headed by F. A. Brewer, Charles Marsh, and Henry S. Lee was established in 1862 to coordinate efforts made on behalf of the soldiers. They started to worry about the sick and wounded soldiers who had been passing through at all hours of the day and night in need of refreshments, care, and nursing. A small wooden building close to the depot was constructed in early August of 1863. It was named "The Soldiers Rest" and for ten months it served the needs of the men. But with the start of the 1864 campaigns, the number of sick and wounded increased so rapidly that the facilities proved inadequate. To meet this new demand, a larger building was erected with a permanent staff and a well equipped hospital department. A total of 9,243 soldiers had been cared for by November 18, 1864.21 Adequate funds to meet the increased demand became a very serious problem. To help raise the necessary funds it was decided to hold a fair on the grounds of the Springfield City Hall. It was planned on a broad scale with all the surrounding communities participating. It was held for four days beginning on December 19, 1864. Even Governor Andrews and his staff were there on the second day. After expenses, the result was a profit of $19,000, which was invested and eventually yielded an additional $11,000.22 By the end of the war "The Soldier's Rest" had served some 17,000 men at a total cost of over $80,000.23

"This and the remaining illustrations in this article are from the picture collection, Springfield City Library."
There were many other organizations besides "The Soldier's Rest" which helped the fighting men. Many of these were established by the women of the "respected families" of Springfield. They put on plays, held strawberry festivals, and set up refreshment stands for the soldiers. Not only was Springfield contributing its share of men to the war, but the community as a whole was supporting the war effort through caring for wounded soldiers.

As a community, Springfield gave steady support to the military effort and to the Lincoln Administration. The support of the Administration was provided by the Springfield Daily Republican, through its owner and editor Samuel Bowles. Bowles was a moderate conservative and his paper reflected his views. Any criticism of the Administration was never over principle, but over policy and how it was executed.

A good example of the support for the Administration was the newspaper's stand on the abolition movement. In the late 1840's and through the 1850's the Republican was against it. The paper distinguished between the legality of slavery in the South and the opposition to the extension of slavery into the territories. Bowles, through his editorials, made certain that the Republican Party was not equated with the abolitionist cause.24 The Republicans in Virginia, the paper said in February of 1860, may be opposed to slavery in Virginia but the Republicans of Massachusetts are not opposed to slavery in Virginia.25 A speech was printed by Senator Henry Wilson from Massachusetts which declared that the Party stood for the exclusion of slavery from the territories.26 When the war became a reality, the Republican kept repeating that restoration of the Union and not abolitionism was the object of the war.27 The issue was also the constitutionality of secession and not freeing the slaves. It warned the public against embracing the latter issue:

Let us not rashly accept a conclusion involving such tremendous consequences. If we adopt it, the war is no longer a war for the Constitution and the Union. It sets aside the Constitution; it is a counter-revolution in the South. It releases the South from its constitutional obligations and makes the contest one of sections and institutions.28

Two months later, in answer to the Abolitionists who were trying to push this policy on the President:

The abolition of slavery is not the object of his administration. He has no right to make that the purpose of war. His present duty is to prosecute the war and to overpower and punish the rebels who seek the destruction of the government.29

When criticism of the Administration did come, which was very seldom, it was never directed at Lincoln personally, but it usually took the form of urging the government to display more vigor in carrying out its policies concerning the war. An example was seen in January of 1862: "...it needs only success or the reasonable prospect of success to bring the democratic masses to the cordial
support of the government, while continued confusion of councils at Washington and disastrous blundering in the field will give courage to sedition.” 30 Even this statement showed no parting of company with Lincoln because the lack of vigor in the military effort was not the fault of the president, for he had no training in handling the enormity and complexity of the task. According to the Republican, the fault rested with the professional military leaders who failed to display the combination of effectiveness and vigor.

The Republican’s steady support of the Administration and the war effort was typical of the community as a whole. As dissatisfaction with the Administration developed it usually took the form of Radicalism. This opposition was given an avenue of expression with the establishment of a new newspaper in Springfield on January 4, 1864 called the Springfield Daily Union. That newspaper supported the war, but stimulated whatever opposition there was to Lincoln in Springfield.

The Union criticized the Administration both on substance and procedure. Its critical commentaries on the President covered a wide range of subjects including:

1. Charging that the war was prolonged because of the President “coddling” the copperheads. The Union demanded harsher treatment of “traitors.” 31

2. Republicans should exert caution in renominating Lincoln, because he lacked the firmness to deal with rebels. “Mr. Lincoln has a warm and generous heart; and so has many a mother, who without a balance of firmness or decision has indulged her children until they are completely ruined. That is our danger now.” 32

3. Disapproved of Lincoln’s leniency to convicted criminals in the armed forces. “The deserter who frustrated General Butler’s scheme for capturing Richmond was another of Mr. Lincoln’s pardoned gentry — sentenced to death for shooting his captain. The villains pardoned in this way would make a very respectable army — in size, nothing else.” 33

4. Praising radicalism as a sound doctrine. “Coercion — radical, earnest, sweeping coercion — has given us all the triumphs of war, and misnamed leniency and conciliation all its horrors and disgraces. Let the People choose shall be the policy for the future.” 34

5. Favoring Senator Charles Sumner’s nomination for the presidency. Describing him as “...one of the few men in Washington possessing a conscience — whose ‘policy’ is to do right now and leave the result to God.” 35

6. Failing to report Lincoln’s renomination with enthusiasm.
Lincoln was also criticized for his call for 50,000 troops, raising the question as to whether this included the 300,000 men recently drafted. "Our excellent President, as usual mixed the matters little, so that probably he himself cannot tell the meaning from the words alone...let us hope that no fresh blunder of that sort is to be added to those which have already protracted the war...He (Lincoln) seems generally to postpone such things to the last moment, and then write in such a tremendous hurry that he befogs his own meaning." 36

Then suddenly, in December of 1864, the *Union* mellowed its critical editorial commentary on the President, and followed it with praise. In a December editorial entitled "The Power of Moderation," the editor stated that the country has come to understand the value of moderation. At one point...the executive administration was regarded as too moderate to meet the just demands of a determined people in the travail of a new epoch and destiny. (Now, we see more clearly)...the moderation of President Lincoln has been the foremost element of his success. It has saved us from many precipitate measures which would have eventuated in disaster, if not in the utter ruin of the country. In all his messages to the Congress, addresses to the people, and private utterances made public, we discover the same unruffled equanimity of feeling; never taken at a disadvantage, never turned aside from the path of public duty through fear or nervous haste. 37

This change can be attributed to the changing political and military scene which made it advisable to take a less rigorous position.

Other people besides newspaper editors expressed their opinions on the war. From these it is clear that the community supported the Administration. One Springfield resident had a sorrowful experience with which residents of other states were more familiar. W. S. Elwell, the patriot painter, wrote in his diary on March 26, 1862 that Chester "is very bitter, he has two sons in the Rebel army. Who dares say that woman has not influence, they married Southern ladies." 38

There was no significant shared opposition to the Administration’s efforts for a Union victory. But there is information available on the activities of two individuals, one in the city and the other in a nearby community, who opposed President Lincoln. Very shortly after the assassination the *Union* reported, "A miserable, low-lived specimen of humanity in Westfield gloated over the death of Mr. Lincoln Saturday morning, when he was taken in hand by a justly incensed crowd and pretty roughly handled." 39

Several weeks later the following appeared in the same paper: "A person dressed in female mourning attire is flaunting about the streets of the city, boasting that she is mourning for the assassin Booth." 40 These were isolated
incidents in the area and were of no real significance. On the whole, Springfield was strong in its support of the war effort and in its loyalty to the Administration.

The greatest contribution that Springfield made to the war effort was made by an organization in the community — the Springfield Armory. The majority of the people who worked there and the men who directed its operations lived in Springfield and surrounding communities, but the precise nature of its activities and the major decisions concerning the Armory were determined elsewhere. The leaders of the community had little or no influence upon the Armory. Since 1815 the superintendent had been an army officer, and because of this they did not have their roots deeply set in the community.

The United States Arsenal, Springfield.

The Armory's origin can be traced back to the Revolutionary War. With the opening of hostilities of that war, a group of men led by Richard Falle of Westfield, banded together to form the nucleus of a gun-making center in Springfield. As the war progressed, the nation depended more on Springfield for its munitions and it quickly became an important storage site, distributing
munitions to the northern and eastern states. By an act passed by Congress in 1794, Springfield was selected as the location for one of three or four national armories that were to be established. Over the years the Armory gradually grew with the addition of land and buildings. By the time of the Civil War it was the major armory in the United States. A second armory was established at Harper's Ferry, Virginia. They both served the nation until the Civil War, when Harper's Ferry fell to the Confederacy. "This left the Springfield Armory as the only national armory..."  

Two facts should be brought out as to the important position of the Armory during the early years of the war. In 1860 some 115,000 muskets were shipped from federal arsenals in the North to Southern arsenals by order of John B. Floyd, the Secretary of War. What made this move really stand out was the fact that Floyd was a Southerner with strong convictions on the "Southern Cause." It was argued that this transferral was applied only to obsolete models, and that it was part of a regular procedure which had been followed for years by the Ordnance Bureau for the supply of state militia. The arms that had been shipped were obsolete, but the fact remains that these old-styled arms were the only type which the Government had in large quantity and the shifting of these arms gave the South an advantage at the outbreak of the war. Of the 115,000 arms shipped to the South, over 100,000 were taken from storage at the Springfield Armory. This was even made more important because the 1855 model (the type which was shipped) was not being produced in great quantity during the pre-war years. Production was hindered by the failure of the government to supply the necessary funds.

During the war years, 1861-1865, the Springfield Armory produced 805,538 shoulder arms of various kinds, the majority being the standard "Springfield" muskets of 1855. The "Springfield" was far superior to the earlier smooth bores and flintlocks which it replaced, yet it was slow and inefficient in loading. The greatest weakness of a muzzle-loading weapon of this type was its ability of receiving several charges without them being discharged. Soldiers found themselves with guns that either blew up or were useless. Around 37,000 muskets of this type were found on the battlefield of Gettysburg and provided the basis for the conclusion reached upon the weapon's weakness.

This was the type generally used by the armies of both sides and it was mass produced by the Armory. Due to the conservative policy of the Ordnance Bureau, experiments with the newer-type weapons were frowned upon. These new weapons were the breech-loading and repeating arms which proved much more efficient than the older model. They did not want to take the time to convert or buy new machinery to produce them. The course of the war could have been greatly affected if there was more faith shown toward these weapons. Given the industrial potential of the North and its vast superiority of forces over the South, the increased fire power could have altered the war in the early years.
During the years from 1861 to 1865 the Armory was faced with many problems, including the lack of materials, machinery, money, and skilled personnel. As the war progressed the high grade iron which was imported from England became more scarce. Because of this, increasing pressure was placed on Captain Alexander Dyer to buy lower grade iron from local companies. Dyer finally found a local firm which could supply the high quality iron needed. He was faced with the problem of finding skilled workers throughout the war and the Armory attracted many German mechanics. The “...Germans had no equals when it came to mechanical ability. Scores of them came to work here...”47 Wages at the Armory skyrocketed. “In the six months between December 1863 and July 1864 the wage increase varied from 15 to 20 percent.”48 As shortage of money delayed payments to the workmen and because of this the labor turnover was high.

![Western view of the Armory Buildings, Springfield.](image)

The Germans were not the only foreigners employed at the Armory; many Irish immigrants also worked there. They came from predominantly rural environments and brought a habit of lawlessness and restlessness into a conservative New England community. The *Springfield Daily Republican* in mid-1862 and the *Springfield Daily Union* in 1864 began to frequently report on the actions taken in the local police court. The crimes of violence and drunkenness were almost exclusively by persons with Irish names.

With the influx of immigrants the working force of the Armory was enlarged at the rate of about 100 percent per month from April to December of 1861.49 During 1861 the Armory employed 3,400 men, produced 276,000 arms
for the year, with around 1,000 muskets a day. The plant also operated two ten-hour shifts a day. The peak month was not reached until October of 1863 when 26,423 muskets were produced. This peak was never met again, but production still remained high.

Throughout the war there was a fear of sabotage, especially since newspapers were publishing how many arms could be produced each month. In 1864 an attempt was made by two men who had somehow gained entrance to the arsenal grounds and persuaded the keeper to let them climb the tower of the Main Arsenal to see the panoramic view. After a short stay up there, they came down and left the grounds. Later, while making his rounds, a night watchman discovered in the tower clock a bundle wrapped in newspapers. He was very suspicious and turned it over to his superiors. "The Infernal Machine" was a bomb made of iron. A pencilled inscription upon the newspaper wrapping indicated that they were from Canada. As it turned out this was the only attempt to sabotage work at the Armory. By the end of the war the Armory had distinguished itself with honor and had withstood the pressure placed upon it by the loss of the Government's other arsenal at Harper's Ferry. Not only did it serve the country, but it also helped Springfield. "It was during these years (1861-1865) that the population of the city increased enormously. Many came to the city to secure employment at the Armory. When the arsenal was curtailed during the close of the war, many of the discharged employees established small industries and businesses."
All through the war Springfield gave her utmost to support the war effort in any way it could. With the end of the war she was faced with many important problems. The industrial community had been stimulated by the war and had to adjust to its conclusion. They had to convert back to a peace time economy, with unemployment bound to occur. With this happening the question arose as to the future of its returning veterans. It also faced the problem of assimilating a large number of persons of foreign origin. These and other problems had to be met and solved not only by Springfield, but by other large cities of its size. The Civil War thus ushered in a new era in the history of Springfield and in American industrialization.

NOTES
3. Ibid., p. 179.
4. W. S. Elwell, Diary, April 17, 1861.
8. Ibid., p. 69-291.
9. Ibid., p. 519.
10. W. P. Derby, Bearing Arms in the Twenty-Seventh Massachusetts Regiment of Volunteer Infantry During the Civil War (Boston, 1883), p. 7.
11. Ibid., Chapters XIV to XVII.
14. Ibid., Chapters XIII to XVI.
15. Ibid., p. 381-397.
18. Bowen, Massachusetts in the War, 1861-1865, p. 873.
22. Ibid., p. 230.
23. Ibid., p. 231.
25. Ibid., February 26, 1860.
26. Ibid., January 26, 1860.
27. See Springfield Daily Republican, all of 1861 and May 23 and October 30, 1862.
28. Ibid., October 2, 1861.
29. Ibid., December 5, 1861.
30. Ibid., January 17, 1862.
31 Springfield Daily Union. February 5, 1864.
32. Ibid., February 19, 1864.
33. Ibid., February 23, 1864. Also March 5, 1864.
34. Ibid., March 31, 1864.
35. Ibid., April 4, 1864.
36. Ibid., February 2, 1864.
37. Ibid., December 16, 1864.
38. W. S. Elwell, Diary, March 26, 1862.
40. Ibid., May 13, 1865.
42. Ibid., pp. 4-5.
43. Ibid., p. 18.
44. Thomas J. Wallace, Portrait of an Ordnance Officer p. 3.
50. Springfield Republican, April 2, 1901.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., p. 59.