



# NOW & THEN

at the  
**LOCAL HISTORY MUSEUM & ARCHIVES**  
(Downstairs at the STOCKBRIDGE LIBRARY)

ISSUE #17

**NOVEMBER 2011**

TO SUBSCRIBE TO

"NOW & THEN"

e-newsletter

contact

[simanl@roadrunner.com](mailto:simanl@roadrunner.com)

Maria L. Carr, Editor

Past issues may be accessed

at the Library website

[stockbridgelibrary.org](http://stockbridgelibrary.org)

## CIVIL WAR

By Joshua Hall

Over the next four years we will observe the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Civil War.

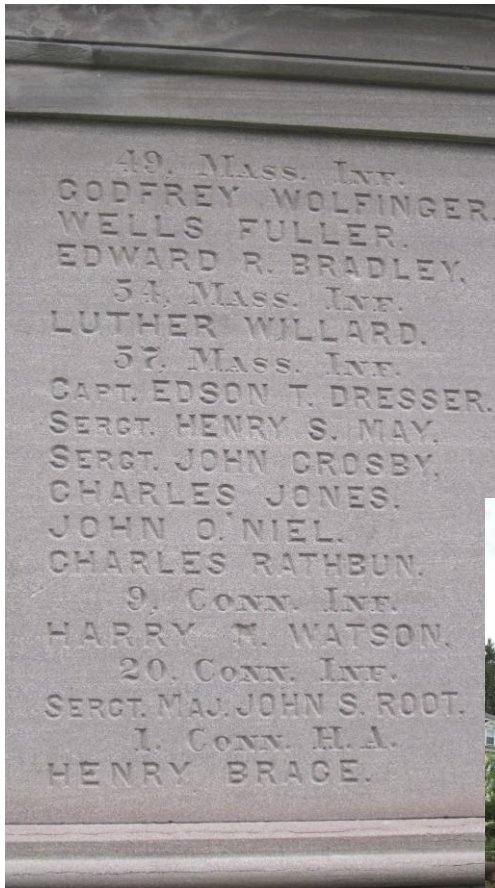
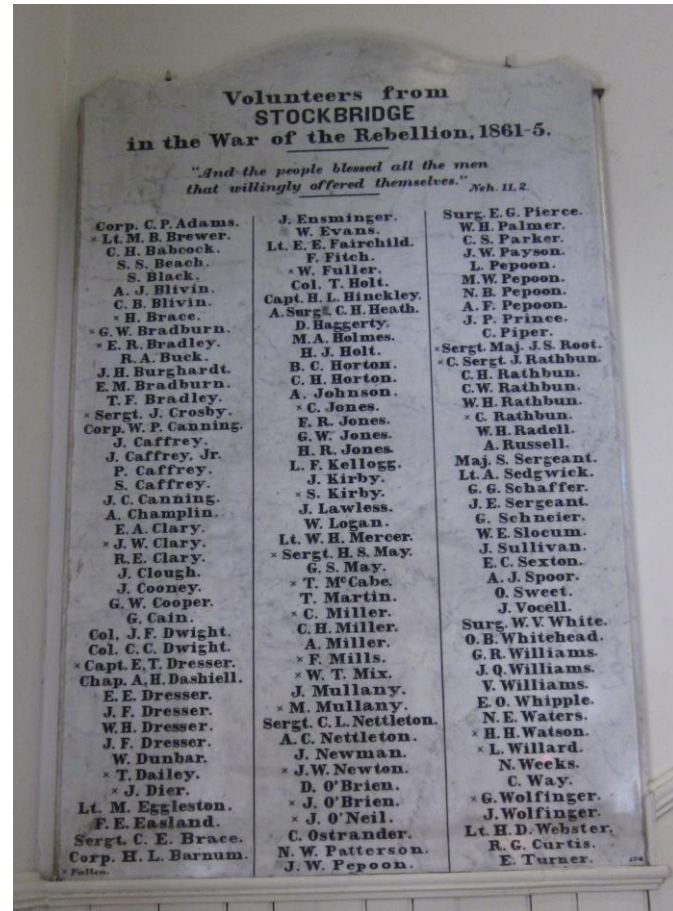
Every town in Berkshire County sent young men off to battle, against the Confederate Army in the South. The story of one group of volunteers bears repeating. The men of the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, all black soldiers, fought valiantly throughout the Civil War.

The town of Stockbridge sent over 130 men to fight, six of them fighting with the Massachusetts 54<sup>th</sup>. All but one of those 4 enlisted in December of 1863. Charles H. Piper enlisted earlier in July. He along with John I. Clow (Clough), Charles T. Way, Luther Willard, John Q. Williams and Valorous Williams all headed to Boston for training and then were sent to South Carolina. It may be inferred that these men decided to join following the arrival of news of the heroism of the 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment in July of 1863 when they led the assault on Fort Wagner in South Carolina. Numerous soldiers and the regiment's commander, Col. Robert Gould Shaw, were

killed during that attack. Although it was a lost battle, their bravery was respected by all.

In the end, only one man, Luther Willard, would not make it home. He died of disease in a hospital in South Carolina in 1864. The rest returned home to Stockbridge and continued their lives. The 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment mustered out of service in August of 1865 and was formally discharged later that September. After the war, some of them joined local GAR chapters. The GAR (Grand Army of the Republic) was founded in 1866 for veterans who served in the Civil War. The GAR was a unique organization during that time period, as most fraternal organizations excluded Blacks or were segregated. Further information on these men and others can be found at the Museum and Archives. You can also find information on other Berkshire County men who served in the Massachusetts 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment by reading David Levinson and Emilie Pipers new book, On the Other Side of Glory.

*Luther Willard's name appears on the Soldier's Monument at the intersection of Pine Street (pictured left) as one of those who died in the war. All 6 of the Stockbridge men are listed on the plaque in the Library located in the Jackson wing going up the stairs (pictured above right).*



## **CIVIL WAR EXHIBIT**

The Museum & Archives has several things in its collection dealing with the Civil War, many of which are not normally on display. Between now and 2015 some of these items will be shown to the public. Currently the Civil War Trunk that belonged to Lieut. Charles W. Kniffin of Co. B. 49<sup>th</sup> Regiment M. V. M. (*Massachusetts Volunteer Militia*) is in the downstairs lobby exhibit area. The trunk is quite unique in that when it is unfolded it converts into a bed (pictured left). Along with the trunk is Lt. Kniffin's hat, bridle and saddle bag. There is also a pillow case and a ticking mattress cover (which you would fill with straw or whatever was at hand), a blanket and mosquito netting for the bed. The trunk opens and you remove and attach the wooden headrest frame, then you insert the 4 poles which the mosquito netting would be draped over (see picture below). This was obviously meant for an average or short man of slight proportions. You may think that this would be horribly uncomfortable; but think of the alternative of sleeping on the ground with mosquitos buzzing around you as you tried to sleep.



The trunk has quite elaborate tooling between the metal straps (pictured right).



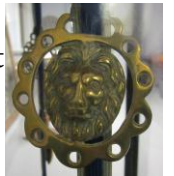
### ***SHADES OF STOCKBRIDGE***

*Barbara would like to thank the 15 Shades and 4 Volunteers that made the "Shades of Stockbridge" presentation on October 1<sup>st</sup> a big success. It was well received and there was a nice turnout. As this is one of the annual fund raisers for the Museum & Archives, thank you all for supporting it.*

### ***PRIVATE COLLECTION EXHIBIT***

An exhibit in the downstairs lobby consists of horse brasses on loan from Roberta Shearn whose family collected them over the years. Horse brasses were intended for decoration on the tack for horses.

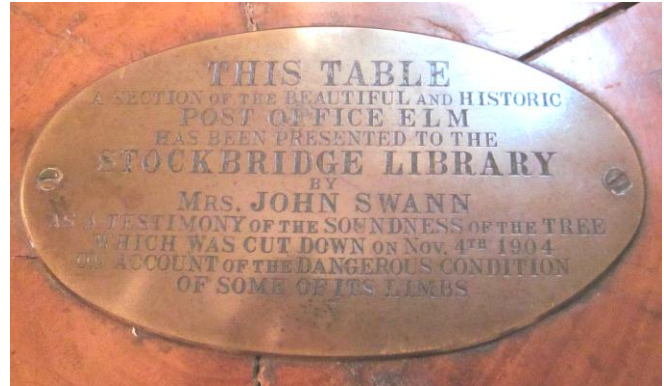
A horse bonnet from the M&A collection is also part of this exhibit. This is the first private collection to be put on display. (Call Barbara if you have a collection you'd like featured in the future)



### OLD POST OFFICE ELM

The elm tree that stood on Main Street in front of the Post Office, when it occupied the building where Minkler's Insurance is currently located, was planted in 1798. It became so big that its limbs had to be supported by chains because of their weight. The spread of the branches measured 260 feet and the trunk was 25 feet in circumference. Due to the dangerous condition of some of its limbs it was cut down on November 4<sup>th</sup> 1904 at the age of 106.

Mrs. John Swann presented the Stockbridge Library with a table made of its wood. The top is a complete cross-section of its trunk including the bark. The table is on display at the Museum & Archives (*pictured below*). There are probably many more items made from this massive elm tree, many of which have lost the distinction as such.



*The inscription on the plaque in the center of the table reads – “THIS TABLE Section of the beautiful and historic POST OFFICE ELM has been presented to the STOCKBRIDGE LIBRARY by Mrs. John Swann as a testimony of the soundness of the tree which was cut down on Nov. 4<sup>th</sup> 1904 on account of the dangerous condition of some of its limbs”.*

During the first half of the century, the elm beetle fought by the Laurel Hill Assoc. followed by Dutch elm disease destroyed the Main Street's elms. The Laurel Hill Assoc. recruited schoolchildren to fight the tent

caterpillars. In 1914, they collected 172,369 egg clusters during the winter and spring. (*Pictured below are 2 of a series of pictures at the Museum & Archives showing the Elm being taken down. Pictured right is a small flag holder which was made from some of the tree. It originally belonged to the American Legion Hall and is currently on display at the Glendale Fire Department.*)



### MUSEUM & ARCHIVES HOURS

**Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 9-5, Thursdays 9-1 and Saturdays 9-2**

*If you plan to spend time researching, it is always a good idea to call (298-5501) to check for availability.*