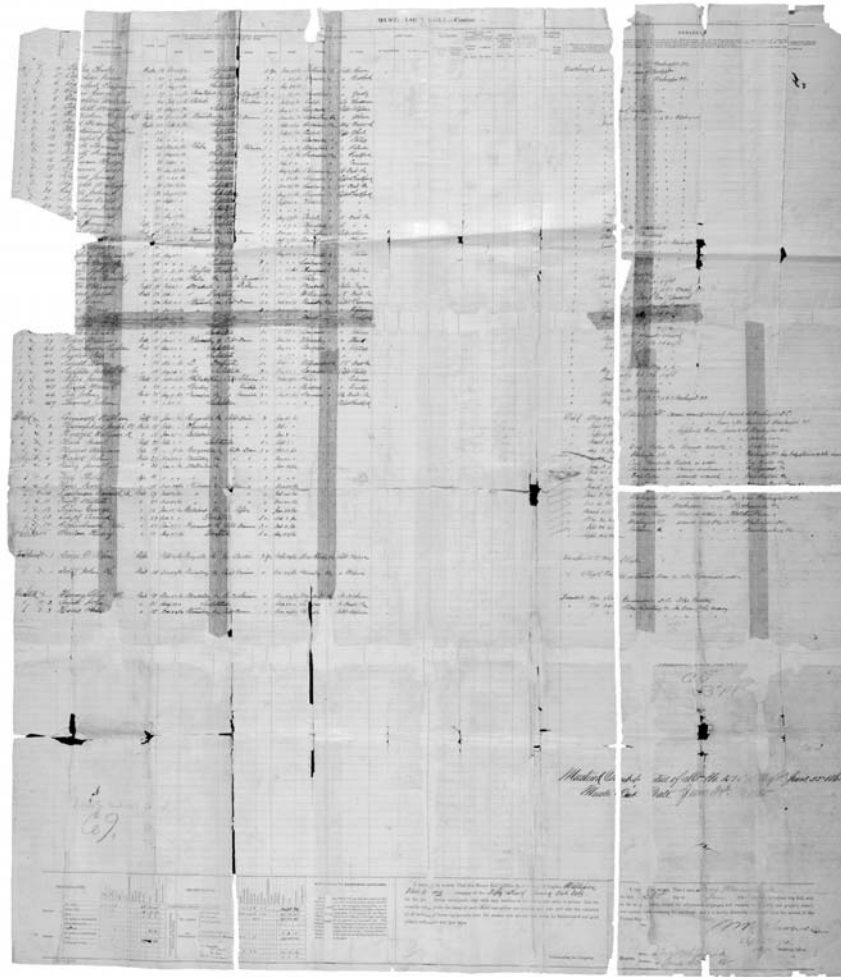


Preserving Pennsylvania's Civil War Muster Rolls

Henry D. Weaver of Company A of the 121st Regiment enlisted in 1862. He survived the entire Civil War and many major battles, including Antietam, Gettysburg, and the Wilderness. When the war ended, he was preparing to go home on April 20, 1865, when he was struck and killed by lightning. Samuel J. Johnson of Oswego, New York, came to Pennsylvania and joined Company A of the Eighth US Colored Troops. The last known official notice of him was that he was a prisoner at Andersonville, Georgia. Charles Fuller of Company D of the Forty-Sixth Regiment was only in the war for a few months when he was kicked out of service in the fall of 1862. Charles Fuller was “detected as being a female.”

The Pennsylvania State Archives maintains all of the records created by the regimental units raised by the commonwealth during the Civil War. Unit holdings include muster in and muster out rolls, casualty and deserter lists, official communications, and other records. Most valued among these are the mustering out rolls, which briefly give each soldier's war story at his time of discharge and, in many cases, beyond it. They are, as historian John B. B. Trussell has noted, “essential for the study” of any regiment's or company's actions during the war. In October 2005, the State Archives began an ambitious project to conserve the 2,500 muster out rolls that are part of Records Series 19.11, “Muster Rolls and Related Records” of the Adjutant General's Office.

Each roll, one to a company, is a preprinted federal government form that was distributed to and used by the army in all Northern states. It contains columns reading left to right with spaces for entering each soldier's name, age, enlistment data, and payment history. The last column on the far right, titled “Remarks,” is the official statement on the final disposition of each soldier. Typical entries here are brief written notations such as: “mustered out with Company,” “held prisoner at Libby Prison,” or “wounded in action at Chancellorsville.” Those soldiers not present at mustering out had entries recorded for them like “recovering in hospital,” “died at Antietam,” “died of disease,” “deserted,” “lost,” or “status unknown.” Though written quickly and dispassionately in a kind of army shorthand by the company's clerk, perhaps not far from a field of battle, some entries are quite dramatic and poignant to the modern reader. Take,



Muster out roll for Company I of the Fifty-Third Regiment of Pennsylvania Volunteers before conservation treatment. Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

for example, the entry for General Strong Vincent: "Died July 8th 1863 of wound received July 2 1863 Battle of Gettysburg, PA. Made Brig. Gen'l." This one brief sentence encapsulates the last days of the Erie hero's life: mortally wounded July second, he was made a brigadier general for all of six days before his death on the eighth.

"Remarks" were created for most of the over 360,000 men who served

in the most seminal event in US history. Pennsylvania was one of the most important states in the North in terms of industrial might and one of the first to respond to President Lincoln's call for troops in the spring of 1861. More Pennsylvanians fought for the Union than from any other state except New York. Commonwealth regiments distinguished themselves throughout the war and in many cases directly affected the outcomes of critical battles: the Fifty-First at Burnside Bridge at Antietam, the Eighty-Third at Little Round Top at Gettysburg, and the anthracite miners of the Forty-Eighth who dug the tunnel and laid the explosives at Petersburg before the Battle of the Crater are but a few of the Keystone State's storied regiments whose contributions are recorded in these rolls. The rolls bear the names and stories of the commonwealth's famous military leaders—Reynolds, Hartranft, Geary—as well as of famous and not-so-famous rank-and-file soldiers, from Medal of Honor awardee George Mears, who distinguished himself the second day of Gettysburg, to Charles Fuller, a woman who disguised herself as a man. The individuals listed represent a microcosm of the diverse ethnic and cultural population of the North. For example, regiments such as the Seventy-Fourth from Pittsburgh, comprised largely of German-speaking soldiers, and the 116th, consisting of Irish from Philadelphia and attached to the famed Irish Brigade are represented. Additionally, the ninety-seven muster out rolls present for the United States Colored Troop units raised in Pennsylvania reveal that at least half of the 8,600 African Americans who enlisted were not from out of state. In early 1863, Pennsylvania became the second state after Massachusetts to recruit African Americans, and many flocked from its border states to join. However, many black Pennsylvanians served in regiments formed outside the state, most notably in Massachusetts, and their names are not recorded here.

In the years following the conflict, the state adjutant general's staff frequently referred to the muster rolls for purposes of verifying service for pension claims by veterans or their widows. The staff also updated the rolls, sometimes years, even decades, after the war. The updates are noted in red ink on the State Archives' rolls and are the key difference from the information provided in Samuel P. Bates's *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers*. Bates used the muster rolls as the basis for publishing information about each regiment. His five-volume set was rushed into print right after the war and published between 1869 and 1871, but Bates did not have time to verify all of the massive information he collected, leading to mistakes in enlistment

and mustering in locations and similar data. Information added to the rolls after 1871 obviously does not appear in Bates's volumes. There is a set of Pennsylvania muster out rolls at the National Archives, likely the Department of the Army's copies, which apparently were never updated in this fashion. These updates make the set at the Pennsylvania State Archives a unique and a more nuanced evidential source. For example, Bates describes Elijah Huntzman from Wilkes-Barre, of Company C, 143rd Regiment, simply as "Deserted February 5, 1863." The roll for Company C at the State Archives for Huntzman states that he specifically deserted from Camp Slocum in Washington, DC, then in red ink next to "Deserted" is written, "Charge erroneous see letter from War Department January 19, 1892." Mr. Huntzman, who was not present at mustering out, evidently had not deserted, and it appears that he spent several decades trying to clear his name. In a similar case, Thomas Kocher of Company F of the 192nd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, is listed by Bates simply as having "deserted June 6, 1863." Again, on the roll in red ink, next to the original notation, is written, "charge removed, discharged June 6, 1863. See letter from War Dept. Sept. 15, 1892." These additions reveal that many soldiers were officially listed as deserters at discharge because they were not present to make their case or had no one to speak for them. Some were perhaps wounded and recovering in a hospital, some were languishing in a rebel prison. Regardless of the reason, it would take Privates Huntzman and Kocher nearly thirty years to change their status and thus qualify for veteran's benefits.

As the large sheets of paper aged and were folded and unfolded by the adjutant general's staff for reference purposes, they broke along fold lines. The unique records were literally being handled to death. Most were broken into twelve or more rectangular pieces, some much worse, and needed to be reassembled like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle just to be readable. Often the well-intentioned staff would duly repair the rolls with whatever was at hand: glue, cloth tape, and later cellophane tape. When the old soldiers passed on, a new research generation, genealogists, and scholars wanted access to the records for purposes of historical and family research. The 135 cubic feet of records were transferred to the State Archives in the 1960s and after fifty years are still the most requested of all of the archives' holdings. During this time archivists constantly worried about the rolls' overworked condition and hesitated to handle them for fear of contributing to their disintegration. An alphabetical three-by-five card

file prepared by Works Progress Administration workers in the 1930s helped allay somewhat harmful browsing and handling.¹

A new kind of “war” began to be waged, one against time and overuse. Thanks to a \$375,000 grant from the federal Save America’s Treasures Program and an additional grant of \$450,000 from the Pennsylvania General Assembly, the State Archives, in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Heritage Society, began to conserve the rolls in October 2005. The ones in worst condition were conserved at the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts in Philadelphia. The remainder was cared for at the State Archives. The goal is to repair all to the point where they can be reproduced easily. The rolls could not be photographed in their preconservation condition; they were too fragmented and fragile. Ultimately, all 2,500 mustering out rolls will be scanned and placed on a free database so that researchers from around the world can access them. The archives is presently making arrangements with Ancestry.com to develop this database.²

The State Archives anticipates the demand on these records to increase, given the current popularity of the Civil War and its sesquicentennial celebration. This project will ensure the precious details of the legacy of the 360,000 men who fought and died for the commonwealth are preserved.

Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission LINDA A. RIES

¹ This card file is now part of a free searchable database at <http://www.digitalarchives.state.pa.us>.

² By 2009, only about 1,600 of the 2,500 muster out rolls had been conserved. Work slowed when the archives realized the number of mends needed was far greater than originally estimated. Funding ran out when a promised third year of appropriation from the Pennsylvania General Assembly did not materialize. In 2010–11, a Keystone Heritage Grant of \$150,000 and some private sector funding helped conserve another 250. An additional \$300,000 in Keystone funding was appropriated in 2011–12, enough funding to complete the project by July 1, 2012. At that juncture, the treated rolls will be scanned by Ancestry.com and placed on an online public database sometime in 2013. More information about conserving the rolls can be obtained by contacting Linda Ries at lries@state.pa.us or 717-787-3023. Ries is also available to organizations to speak about the project.