

# REMEMBERING THE CIVIL WAR IN PENNSYLVANIA

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**THE** AMERICAN CIVIL WAR remains one of the most written about, read about, and wondered about conflicts in history. The enormity of the calamity that tore the nation apart less than a century after its founders imagined a new form of democratic republic is still difficult for us to fathom. Recent scholarship puts the death total at 700,000 or more—greater than all other American wars combined—leaving our country challenged to pull the states and their diverse peoples back together, an unfinished task that we wrestle with even today. The history of the Civil War reveals the best and worst in us. It demonstrates the horrors of war as well as “the better angels of our nature.” Volumes have been dedicated to the causes of the war. Historians generally agree with Abraham Lincoln’s assessment that slavery was “somehow the cause of the war,” though political ideology and economics were inextricably tied to the tragic consequences of the secession of the Southern states and the four years of fighting that set new precedents for modern warfare.

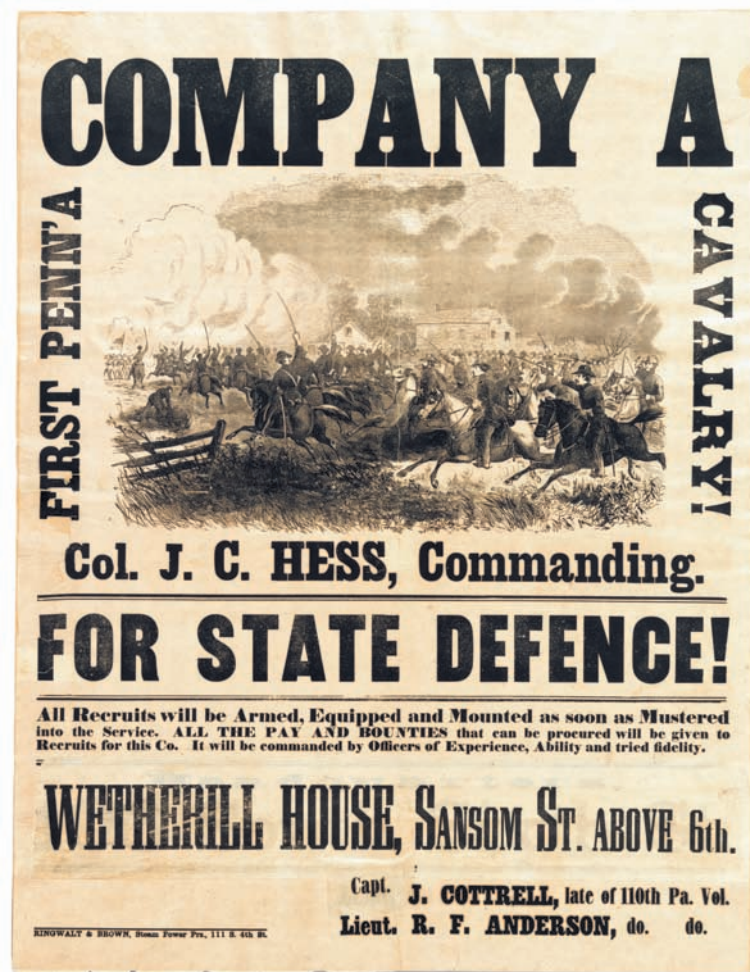
Through it all, Pennsylvania played a pivotal role, both on the home front and the battle front. The Keystone State provided more materiel and manpower than any state but New York. Pennsylvania men—both white and black—were among the first defenders serving bravely on land and sea. Pennsylvania’s mills, factories, and workshops became the “arsenal of the Union” and its farms the breadbasket. Women war workers played a significant role as did the many civilian volunteers and fundraisers who managed the nation’s largest Sanitary Fairs for the benefit of soldiers in the field or recuperating in hospitals. Sacrifice and privation marked the lives of those at home, and death could come as suddenly for women arsenal workers as it did for uniformed combatants. The deadly

explosion at Pittsburgh’s Allegheny Arsenal came on the very day that the Battle of Antietam saw the bloodiest single day in American history—September 17, 1862.

This year millions of Americans will make their way to Gettysburg, a place with the power to evoke memories of those who have gone before. It also has the power to inspire our generation to carry on the work that those who struggled there so nobly began. Lincoln’s dedication address at the Gettysburg National Cemetery in November of 1863 was one of the shortest ever uttered by an American president, but it will long be remembered. If the Battle of Gettysburg, July 1–3, 1863, marked the turning point of the Civil War then the Gettysburg Address might also be considered a turning point as the people of the nation began to comprehend the purpose of the war and the “new birth of freedom” that would remake the United States. Gettysburg symbolizes a turning point in American history, and it is altogether fitting and proper that we remember it now on the 150th anniversary of the Civil War.

This joint issue is a precedent-setting partnership combining the best scholarship of Pennsylvania’s leading historical institutions:

the Heinz History Center (founded 1879), the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (1824), and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (1945), originally organized as the Pennsylvania Historical Commission (1914). ★



Recruitment poster for the 1st Pennsylvania Cavalry.  
Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Poster and Broadside Collection.