

This Week in Saratoga County History

The Life and Death of Saratoga's Statue to the 77th Regiment

Submitted by David Fiske – September 17, 2020

David Fiske, a resident of Ballston Spa, is a researcher who writes on various historical topics. His book, Ballston Spa History Walkaround, relates interesting information about some of the buildings in that village. It is available from the gift shop at Brookside, and from Amazon. Fiske co-authored Solomon Northup: The Complete Story of the Author of Twelve Years a Slave, and Madame Sherri--The Special Edition. He also wrote the books Solomon Northup's Kindred: The Kidnapping of Free Citizens before the Civil War, and Forgotten on the Kennebec: Abandoned Places and Quirky People. Dave can be reached at dafiske@gmail.com



Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper.

Early in the Civil War, many men from [Saratoga County](#) (and some from Essex and Fulton Counties) joined the 77th Regiment, its unit number chosen to recall the 1777 Battle of Saratoga during the American Revolution. It was known as the “Bemis Heights Regiment,” the place so evocative of the “turning point” of the War of Independence.

On the morning of Thanksgiving Day in 1861 over 700 men departed their camp at a former fairground, and boarded trains which would transport them south. They took with them blankets collected by local women, and cloaks sewn by them, so that the men would be protected from the cold of the oncoming winter.

The 77th would see much action during the course of the war. In addition to those who returned to Saratoga County to live afterward, many former soldiers kept in touch by attending reunions, usually held in the village of Saratoga Springs

Not attending these reunions were over 280 men who died fighting, or as a result of wounds or disease. The regiment underwent some consolidations and reorganizations during the course of the war, so that eventually around 1,500 men served in its ranks at some point or other. The [regiment's history](#) is storied, and the list of battles in which it participated is extensive.

As early as 1871, six years after the regiment was mustered out of Federal service, a design for a monument was in the works. Such a project had been contemplated for some time. Though funds were raised, and arrangements made for the creation of the monument, the location where it would stand was not finalized until late in the process. Not long before the memorial was installed, the proprietors of Congress Park gave up the corner where it would be placed, which would become known as Monument Place.

On September 21, 1875 ceremonies were held in Saratoga to dedicate the monument. A parade started at the Town Hall, and participants included veterans of the 77th and other regiments, local officials, civic leaders, and citizens. They marched to the site of the monument at the Broadway side of the park. The *Saratogian* noted that both sides of Broadway were "fairly blockaded" with spectators and estimated the crowd as numbering between 7,000 and 10,000 people. From a platform next to the monument, speakers reviewed the history of the regiment.

At a time signaled by the firing of a gun, the fabric that covered the bronze figure of a soldier dropped, and this was met with a great cheer from the crowd. The ceremony continued with more speeches and music, both appreciated by those present. When the dedication was completed, the veterans enjoyed an elegant meal back at the Town Hall.

For decades the soldier guarded his corner of Congress Park. The sentinel watched as the park next to him was re-designed. But ultimately, the age of the automobile forced a change. At the time of its dedication, it was reported that the monument was located in a position that "will give ample walking and driving room on either side." But things had become awkward for automobile traffic, and the monument needed to be moved further into the park. (In 1875, the park had extended into the present Broadway, but when the city acquired some of its square-footage, the street was widened, with the result that the monument was actually in the street, with cars trying to navigate around it.)

In the fall of 1921, bids were sought to accomplish the move, and the relocation was completed before the end of the year. No sort of time capsule was found in the original foundation, but two containers were left open for a time in the new one, so that members of the public could deposit items of significance.

The following September, members of the regiment gathered in Saratoga (fewer than 60 were still living, and only 20 of those were in attendance). In addition to talking over their war experiences over dinner, they passed a resolution thanking the city officials (Saratoga Springs having become a city by then) for their cooperation in relocating the monument.

This unknown soldier (for if the man depicted ever had a name, it has been lost to time) stood year after year, in fair weather and foul, reconnoitering the grounds of the park. Neither snow nor ice, nor gusting winds, nor bolts of electricity from the skies could force him from his post. Instead, on a recent midsummer evening, he was brought down by uncaring – perhaps misguided – human hands, with the use, possibly, of a few dollars' worth of rope. Our “unknown” soldier was defeated by person or persons unknown, skulking about in the darkness.

