

The Civil War

By

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The Civil War was this nation's single most defining experience. It was the bloodiest conflict in American history, 620, 000 casualties, more than almost all other American wars combined. Ultimately the Civil War would give new meaning to the word freedom. Naturally the war would have a profound effect on the people of this town.

In the Presidential elections of 1860 and 1864 a small majority, but a majority no less voted against Lincoln. Why? Slavery was a major cause, if not the most important cause of the Civil War. But Northerners were bitterly divided over the issue of the abolition of slavery. Northern workers, many of them Irish, resented the possible competition for jobs that they believed would take place if 4 millions slaves When New York City longshoremen went on strike and were replaced by free African American workers, their worst fears were realized. Marble quarries became inoperative during the war. Unemployment was rampant.

At the start of the Civil War Lincoln did not free a slave. His initial goal was to preserve the Union, not to free the slave. Lincoln, the practical politician, was painfully aware of political realities. He was mindful of racist sentiment In the North. He was deeply concerned about having border states, slave states that had no seceded from the union, become part of the confederacy He also understood that to free the slaves without an important victory on the battlefield would have been a futile and empty gesture.

In the late summer of 1862 Lincoln called for 300,000 new volunteers to preserve the union. Primary sources recently discovered in the last ten years show that over 100 people from Eastchester answered Lincoln's call to preserve the union. One of the Eastchester soldiers who volunteered, William Thiselton, wrote in his journal, "It is safe to say that patriotism is the only motive that brought this body together in defense of our country's cornerstone, the constitution."

The town as the rest of the North was bitterly divided over the war. At the start of 1863 the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing slaves in areas of rebellion, went into effect. On March 3, 1863, Congress passed the first draft law in American history. The Civil War had become a poor man's fight. Rich people were able to pay a sum of \$300 to get someone to take their place in the draft. The town of Eastchester used local revenue to provide bounties for people whose occupations were vital to the community.

When news of the horrendous casualties at Gettysburg reached New York City on July 11, 1863 the New York City draft riots took place. Immigrants, mainly Irish, irrationally blamed African Americans and the Republican Party for the war. A grotesque race riot ensued. Roving bands

attacked and lynched African American men, women, and children. An African American orphanage was set ablaze. Irish firemen led 20 children to safety. The entire New York City police force as well as five battle hardened regiments of United States troops were brought in halt the murders and restore order. In the end, at least 105 people were killed, making the draft riots the most violent insurrection in American history.

Disturbances from the New York City draft riots spread to to Eastchester. Rioters tore up rails on the New Haven and Harlem tracks near the Bronx River. A sympathetic mob from the marble quarries at Tuckahoe went on the march armed with sticks, stones, and other makeshift weapons with the avowed purpose of burning down the houses of all the Republicans in the place. Captain William Barker assembled a home guard and took a stand in a cartridge factory on Fifth Avenue and near First Street in present day Mount Vernon. Several prominent Democrats met the mob and convinced them to give up the notion of burning houses.

The Conscription Act and ensuing Draft Riots had biased poor against rich, magnified racial fears, and highlighted the perception that the federal government under Republican leadership had spearheaded an intrusion of federal government as never before over local affairs. These tensions would last long after the Civil War/