



Guest view: Monument serves as a lasting memory

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Special to the Observer-Dispatch

Posted May 28, 2011 @ 09:00 PM

Recommend



EDITOR'S NOTE: Memorial Day, which is observed Monday, traces its roots to America's Civil War. In 1891, Utica dedicated a monument in memory of Uticans who served in the Union Army during that war, and located it at Oneida Square. That monument will soon become a centerpiece in a roundabout being created at the square, where five roads intersect. In observance of Memorial Day, the monument and Uticans' role in the Civil War, retired Utica teacher Ted Rajchel prepared this article.

The roundabout planned at Oneida Square in Utica will beautify the area and help bring our city back to its glory. This is a great start, and other areas will soon develop along with the Bagg's Square Historic District and Harbor Point, as well as the development of Rutger Park, a center of 19th-century politics and architecture. The Landmarks Society of Greater Utica wants to develop the latter project.

Our past will be our future. History will repeat itself. People once more will get involved and see that Utica is a city of many happenings for America's greatness. Utica was a city that was asleep; it now has woken up, yawned, and stretched its arms. Now it is going to work, wide awake.

We must be positive about our future. Negativity will destroy what is necessary to move ahead. We're on the right track. We just need to pull together and work to make our redevelopment a successful reality.

During the Civil War, Utica gave 14 generals to the great American cause. One of these great Civil War generals was Daniel Butterfield, born Oct. 31, 1831, in Utica. He graduated in 1849 from Union College in Schenectady.

Butterfield was the son of John Butterfield, who helped establish companies that became American Express Co., Wells Fargo, Western Union. Newsmen gathered in Utica, because of the telegraph, and formed The Associated Press. John Butterfield was a former mayor of Utica, a pioneer in the telegraph and railroad industries and the founder of Butterfield Overland Mail Co. (1858-1861), a 2,800 mile stage coach route between St. Louis and San Francisco, which opened up America from the east to the Pacific Ocean.

He helped to develop the telegraph from the east to the Pacific Coast, thus ending the Pony Express. President Lincoln used the telegraph almost a thousand times to move supplies and union troops. Americans were informed of the Emancipation Proclamation by telegraph. John Butterfield is buried in Utica's Forest Hill Cemetery. A statue of him marks the gravesite. The post office in downtown Utica, across from Hotel Utica, is named in his honor.

Only days after Fort Sumter, on April 16, 1861, Daniel Butterfield joined the Army as a first sergeant in Washington, D.C. He had little military background beyond part-time militia activities. Within two weeks he obtained a commission as a colonel in the 12th New York Militia, which became the 12th New York Infantry. By July he commanded a brigade, and by September he was a brigadier general.

Gen. Butterfield fought in 43 bloody battles in the Civil War and suffered two wounds, one at Gettysburg. He became a major general and chief of staff in the Army of the Potomac. During the Battle of Gaines' Mill, Butterfield held his line against the Confederate Army, and when the ammunition ran low and the line wavered, he caught the flag and shouted to his men that the battle was not lost as long as they had bayonets. They fixed bayonets and won the battle. Butterfield suffered his second wound at this battle. It was for this signal display of courage that the United States government voted him a Medal of Honor.

Butterfield was the inventor of distinctive patches to identify members of different army corps — patches on uniforms, marking military vehicles, books on army discipline and army matters. He was a brilliant Civil War soldier. At a meeting with President Lincoln, he was a possible choice to be the chief general of the Union Army, but General Ulysses S. Grant was selected.

Daniel Butterfield was not pleased with the call for lights out when the soldiers retired for the night. Feeling that the call was too formal to signal the day's end, and with the help of a bugler, Oliver Wilcox Norton (1839-1920), Butterfield wrote taps to honor his men while in camp at Harrison's Landing, Va., following the Seven Days Battle. These battles took place during the Peninsular Campaign of 1862. The new call, taps, sounded that night in July 1862, soon spread to other units of the Union Army and was reportedly also used by the Confederates. Later, taps was carried by buglers to troops fighting with General Grant in Tennessee and rapidly made its way through the entire union army and eventually became accepted as a regulation U.S. Army bugle call.

Eventually, taps was sounded at funerals, wreath-laying ceremonies, over soldiers' graves and at memorial services. Its easily

recognized melody evoked emotion, as the melody is both haunting and eloquent. One feature of Memorial Day celebrations everywhere is the playing of taps. It is also played at Veterans Day observances.

After returning to private life in 1870, Butterfield worked at American Express Co. and was active in veterans' groups. He also served as assistant secretary of the Treasury under Ulysses S. Grant. Butterfield was successful and wealthy, and lived in grand style at his estate overlooking the majestic Hudson River. He died of a stroke on July 17, 1901, at Cold Springs. Before his death, Butterfield wrote to Elihu Root from Clinton, who was secretary of war, for permission to be buried at West Point. Root granted his request, even though Butterfield was not an academy graduate.

His monument is 35 feet high and made of pure white marble. Rising from its terrace foundations are 16 slender columns, each 10 feet tall. On them are recorded the 43 war battles in which the general from Utica participated. Taps was played at his burial.

Many of Gen. Butterfield's possessions — medals, mess kit swords — are in the collection of the Oneida County Historical Society.

On Oneida Square, the Soldiers and Sailors Monument was dedicated with ceremony by Gen. Daniel Butterfield in 1891. Since the roundabout is to be developed and surrounded by a park, I think it would be great to name the park, "The Butterfield Taps Veterans Park," in honor of this great Utican and American hero.

Taps can be played at Memorial Day ceremonies to honor our fallen military heroes and veterans and also on the Fourth of July to commemorate the freedoms we all enjoy.

History is not dead. More Uticans should be involved in safeguarding the architectural and historical heritage of the city of Utica, which reflects elements of its history, culture, social and economic development. When we preserve our American heritage, we preserve our city and future.



The time has come to put Utica back on the map where it deserves a place of honor for all of America to appreciate. Our past will be our future.

We need to liven up the Civil War monument in the Oneida Square area. A history marker sign with information about General Daniel Butterfield and taps could be put up around this piece of American history. The city of Utica is a great part of America.

Ted Rajchel is a retired Utica school teacher. He lives in New Hartford.

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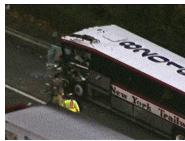
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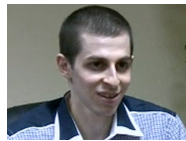
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