

*Yesterday, 10 (Dec, 1960)*

INTERESTING DETAILS OF A CHARITY MEETING

IN PORTVILLE, NEW YORK

A report of Bea L. Eldridge, Town Historian

Sergeant Amos Humiston, Portville, was killed on the battle field of Gettysburg and was identified by means of the ambrotype of his children found in his hands, Dr. Bourne of Philadelphia came to Portville on Saturday, January 2, 1864 to present the precious relic in person to the family. As soon as possible upon his arrival, accompanied by the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of which Mrs. Humiston was a member, Rev. J. H. Vincent a Methodist Bishop of Illinois, who was providentially in Portville and Mr. A. T. Worden, an elder of the church, visited the humble home of the family to discharge his sad duty.

His coming had been anxiously looked for by the widow and her children. When the relic, stained with the blood of her husband, was presented to the wife, her hands shook like an aspen leaf, but by a strong effort she retained her composure. They talked awhile and then it was suggested that as the hand of God was so apparent in all the events that led to such an unusual meeting, that they unite in a prayer of praise for His wonderful kindness as shown by His strange providence.

On the next day a union meeting was held in the Presbyterian Church at which several clergymen and citizens of Olean were present, the house was filled to its utmost capacity. The pastor of the church, the Rev. I. G. Ogdan, made an address of welcome in substance as follows:

"I have the pleasure of introducing Dr. Bourne of Philadelphia and of bidding him a cordial and hearty welcome to Portville. We assure you Sir, that your generous deeds have heralded and preceded your coming. The deep interest you have taken in the family of our brave townsman who shed his life's blood to defend your state from invasion and pillage, has touched a corresponding chord in our hearts. We welcome you not only for the interest you have taken in the family of our soldier but as in some degree the representative of the many families all over the land who are in similar circumstances. The people are just beginning to realize what a debt of gratitude the owe to these brave

men who have fallen on the bloody battlefields of the war, and the large debt of sympathy and support, if needed, that is due to their families. How much these soldiers thought of their families and what a sacrifice they made in leaving wife and children at the call of their country, we may learn somewhat from that touching incident of the dead soldier at Gettysburg, who, as life was slowly ebbing away, was gazing fondly upon the pictured faces of his three children about to become orphans, and thinking of their mother soon to be left to widowhood. The love of a parent for his children and the love of a patriot for his country are among the strongest emotions of the soul; and both were developed in noble hearted Humiston. Truth is stranger than fiction. That ambrotype found in his hand, led at length to his identification and has now brought you to this lengthy journey to present the precious relic in person to the bereaved family."

Dr. Bourne replied in a happy and gracious manner, expressing his heartiest thanks for his kind reception, and proceeded to relate in a graphic manner, the incidents connected with the finding of the ambrotype in the possession of M. Schriver of Gettysburg, and the manner in which, by a notice of the incident published in the American Presbyterian, the family of the dead soldier was discovered.

Dr. Bourne brought with him copies of the ambrotype to sell for the benefit of the family. It was the design of the Doctor and his friends in Philadelphia to turn this most touching incident to a larger account than simply to provide comfortably for the family of Sergeant Humiston. They felt that it would be a remarkable illustration of the wonderful ways of Providence if from the little ambrotype found in the dead soldier's hands, should spring a great national charity.

Later in 1866 an orphanage for children of Civil War Soldiers who had died on the battlefield was established at Gettysburg, having been influenced by the finding of the ambrotype of Sergeant Humiston's children. Mrs. Humiston and her three children went to Gettysburg and lived in the orphanage. She was a member of the staff. About one hundred children lived in the home.

In 1876 the orphanage was then directed to be closed down after criminal prosecutions were brought against the matron, Mrs. Rosa Carmichael, because of mistreatment of the children. The full account of this Portville meeting was in the Olean Times issue of January 1864.

*SECRET Amos Humiston  
154TH NY*