



Allegany Area Historical Association

October 2018

www.allegany.org

Issue XXXVII Vol. 3

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

October already! And October is the month to pay your dues. Since all our members receive the newsletter, we don't send out reminders – this is it. This year we are raising our dues. As you know, the price of everything is going up, especially postage and printing. Our new dues structure is: \$15 – single membership; \$20 – family membership; \$25 or more – patron membership. If you don't pay after a reasonable time you will be removed from our lists and won't receive the newsletter, so please pay now.

We are having a special meeting in October, on the 14th, and full details are elsewhere in this newsletter. We are having an outdoor meeting at the Five Mile Cemetery for a dedication of a historic marker there in honor of Pvt. Oscar Wilber, who served in the Civil War. We are planning a short program (hopefully about 30 minutes) for the dedication. If you plan on attending, you are **urged** to bring a lawn chair. In case of inclement weather, the ceremony will be held at our Heritage Center, with a picture of the marker being shown.

In response to our plea for a new(er) vacuum cleaner, we were given a brand new one from an anonymous donor. It works great! Thank you.

A while back, we asked our readers if anyone knew about Puggity Chute or Puggedy Shoot, which was apparently a local name for South Second Street, which is long gone now. We're no smarter now than we were before. Char Sendlakowski has been keeping a look out in the Citizen, and this is what she found. In 1940, there was a bowling team called the Puggedy Shoots, comprised of D. Rado, D Leilous, M. Peterson and O. Smith. In 1947 the Allegany Citizen editor stated that nobody knows why the lower part of Second Street was once called Puggity Shoot. In 1954 mention was made in the Village Board minutes of South Second Street. In 1957 we find the last mention of "what was once South Second Street" in a page 1 story.

We have a new mystery for you. We had a visitor stop in this summer who is renovating a house in Vandalia. After taking off the inside walls he came across a menu card, glued to the wall, from the Big Oak Inn. A chicken dinner was \$1.50, and a steak dinner was \$1.25! At the top it says to phone Allegany 516F3, but no address. Any ideas of where this was? No sooner than I had written this than we heard from Pam Olkowsky, who lives on the North Nine Mile, and who solved our mystery! Betty Amore had told her that the Big Oak Inn was on an extension of the North Nine Mile, between the highway and the river, and probably got washed out in one of the periodic floods that hit the river.

Francie Potter, President

At 2:00 P.M. on Sunday, October 14, 2018, an historic roadside marker will be dedicated at the Five Mile Cemetery by the Allegany Area Historical Association and the descendants of the Wilber Family. Funded by the William G. Pomeroy Foundation, this marker commemorates Pvt. Oscar F. Wilber and his encounter with the American poet Walt Whitman during the climax of the Civil War. The event is open to the community and all are invited to attend.

Wilber and Whitman: How a Local Soldier Inspired a Poet

by Spencer Morgan

In the first half of the 19th century, Freeman Wilber, Sr., a veteran of the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 settled in Western New York. Freeman and his wife, Mercy (Kenyon, also spelled "Kinyon"), traveled to the Five Mile tract of Allegany and Humphrey (then the Town of Burton) from Rhode Island by way of Onondaga County. With them came seven sons, as well as other families who migrated to the area from Rhode Island after the Revolution including the families Hitchcock, Barber, Kenyon, among others. By the 1850s, the Wilber's and their relatives had settled various farms stretching from the foot of Chapel Hill northward up the Five Mile Valley towards the Hinsdale town line. By the time of the Civil War, Freeman and Mercy had entered into eternal peace and were resting in the newly created family cemetery on Church Road along with three of their sons. Sadly, the earth around them would soon be moved again, but this time in honor of their grandsons who would fight and die for the Union cause.

A dozen or so Wilber relatives fought with the Union Army. They included several brothers and cousins: Charles, Darius, Lyman, Milo, Oscar, Philo, Wallace, Sanford Kinyon, and Edmund Tracy; as well as brothers and cousins-in-law George Benjamin, Myron Canada, and Danford Hall. Of these men's stories, Oscar Wilber's is one fraught with anguish and a chance encounter with a historical figure- the famed American poet Walt Whitman.

On August 11, 1862, the then 24 year-old Oscar enlisted for service in Hinsdale. He was then mustered in on September 24, 1862 as a Private in Company G of the 154th New York Volunteer Infantry. Oscar was the son of Alanson (also spelled Alansing) and Sally (Richmond) Wilber. Together, Alanson and Sally had several children including their eldest son, Oscar Franklin. Alanson died in 1852 and left Oscar his farm. With Oscar lived his widowed mother, grandmother, an invalid sister, and younger sisters and brothers. With his enlistment, Sally managed the farm with the help her remaining children, a farmhand, and the assistance of a neighboring uncle, Nathan Wilber who was a younger brother of her late husband.



Beautiful Farms and Hills in Upper Five Mile Valley, postcard ca. 1940. The fields in the center-left of the image are where the Alanson and Sally Wilber farm once stood.

Many accounts survive detailing the infantry's march into Virginia, including those written in Oscar Wilber's own hand back home to his mother. The 154th New York Infantry's "baptism of fire" came at the Battle of Chancellorsville, which began on April 30, 1863 in Spotsylvania County, Virginia. On the evening of May 2, 1862, General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's army drove General Hooker's exposed flank back. This included driving the 154th New York from a rifle pit near Dowdall's Tavern back towards the woods. Company G of the 154th spent most of the night under fire in an improvised trench. That evening, Stonewall Jackson was shot and wounded by friendly fire. Jackson's left arm was amputated just below the shoulder. During the late morning of May 3, 1862, the Battle of Chancellorsville ensued with a barrage of gunfire and artillery explosions. Company G was torn apart by an artillery shell, with a fragment hitting Oscar Wilber and breaking his right femur in half. Captain Matthew Cheney of Company G examined Oscar's wound. Oscar's leg was mangled and the bone was exposed. There was very little Cheney and his men could do for their comrade, and they were forced to leave the young private behind in the trench as they were pushed back. During the battle, the 154th suffered 240 men killed, wounded, or captured. The entire Union Army suffered over

17,000 casualties and the Confederate Army suffered almost 13,000 casualties during the Battle of Chancellorsville.

Pvt. Oscar Wilber was now behind enemy lines. One day after the battle, musicians from a Mississippi regiment's brass band located Oscar, loaded the wounded soldier onto a stretcher, and removed him to a Confederate field hospital. One of the musicians, Philip Friedrich, wrote to Sally Wilber at her son's request: "Although an enemy, I could not refuse attending his wounds, as far as I was able... The wound I should judge is a mortal one." Oscar laid on the battlefield for ten days, his wound never dressed. By then, Stonewall Jackson had already died of his wounds and amputation- a fate many of those wounded at Chancellorsville would suffer.

Oscar was finally retrieved with other Union wounded during a prisoner exchange under a flag of truce. He was taken across the Rappahannock River to a hospital near Brooks Station. While there, Milo Wilber visited his wounded cousin and reported back to Oscar's mother: "Oscar wanted me to tell you that he is willing to die. He thought he was prepared to die, and I think he was. He says you must not trouble yourself about him." Oscar then asked Milo to dictate his last wishes and financial affairs including leaving the farm now in his name to his mother, Sally, and his sister as well as distributing his livestock and paying his debts.

On June 14, 1863, Oscar was moved onto a ship at Aquia Landing and travelled the Potomac River to the capital city. The ship docked the following day and the wounded were unloaded onto a pier at the Sixth Street Wharf in Washington, D.C. There, Oscar laid overnight until the next day when he was assigned and relocated to Ward K of Armory Square Hospital. While at Ward K, the young private was cared for by a handful of attendants and strangers. Of these strangers who came across the dying Oscar Wilber was none other than Walt Whitman. Since his own brother's enlistment, the poet was serving as a volunteer with the Christian Commission, raising money for extra food and supplies for the soldiers. Walt Whitman spent most of his time at the bedsides of wounded soldiers, offering comfort by conversing with the men, reading to them, and writing letters home on their behalf.

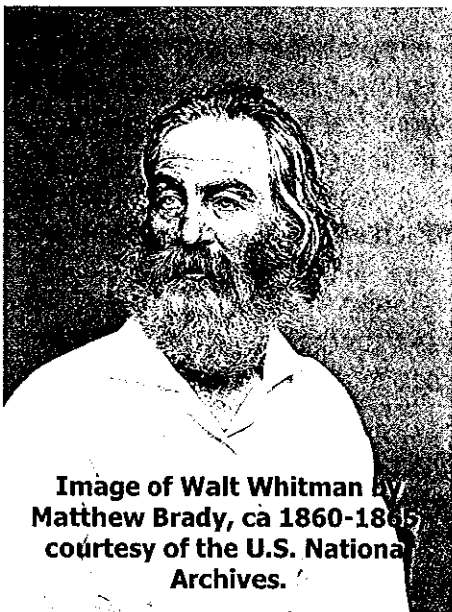


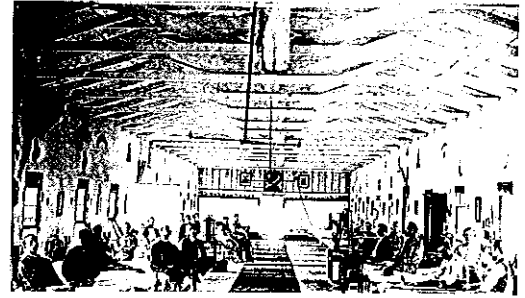
Image of Walt Whitman by Matthew Brady, ca 1860-1865, courtesy of the U.S. National Archives.

Whitman comforted Oscar Wilber, reading passages of the Bible to the private as he laid suffering from his wounds.

Walt Whitman published a number of his "specimens of hospital visits" including an account of his relationship with Pvt. Oscar Wilber. This author's sketch would first appear in the New York Times' Sunday edition on December 11, 1864 as part of Whitman's article: *Our Wounded and Sick Soldier; Visits Among Army Hospitals, At Washington, on the Field, and here in New-York*. Later, Whitman would edit and rename this brief account as *A New York Soldier as part of his Specimen Days*.

Between May 3 and July 31, 1863, several letters were sent to Sally. Many of these included money from Oscar to his mother and were written by friends and relatives, while others were scribed by strangers and good Samaritans. The final known letter to Sally during Oscar's painful last days was from a stranger who had been looking in on the young private, A. J. Pratt. On July 30, 1862 he wrote to Sally the following: "Mrs. Wilber- Saw Oscar last evening. He had not eaten any thing during the day and is rapidly fading-AJP." Oscar Franklin Wilber died on July 31, 1862. For ninety days, Oscar laid wounded with little consolation and little relief from pain regardless of

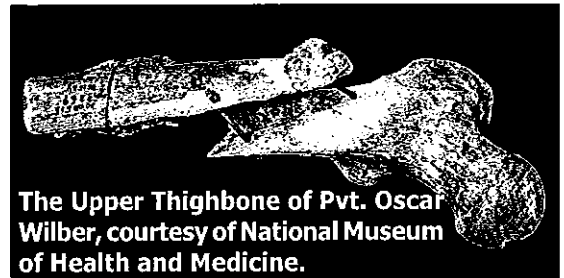
what care and medical attention was given. For ninety days, Oscar laid preparing for death and worrying about his family and how they would survive without him.



Washington, D.C. Patients in Ward K of Armory Square Hospital, August 1865, courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

After his death, a surgeon performed an autopsy and removed Oscar Wilber's right femur from its fleshy casing. The shattered bone was cleaned and sent to the surgeon general's office as a medical specimen. The rest of Oscar's remains were returned to his family in Humphrey. Oscar was buried near his father in the family plot at the Five Mile Cemetery just over the town border in Allegany. Oscar's upper thighbone is now part of the collection at the National Museum of Health and Medicine in Washington, D.C. No known photographs of Pvt. Oscar Wilber or his family have survived.

Of the Wilber relatives that went off to war: George Benjamin, Danford Hall, and Darius Wilber were discharged due to wounds and illness; Sanford Kinyon, Lyman Wilber, Oscar Wilber, and Philo Wilber were killed in action or died as a result of their wounds; and Edmund Tracy died as a prisoner of war.



Back home in the Five Mile Valley, several Wilber children would die of disease and infection before the end of the war. By 1870, over a dozen of Freeman and Mercy's grandchildren and great-grandchildren aged 3 days to 25 years were killed by war or disease. Their descendants would now include several widows and wounded veterans shrouded in mourning. A dark shadow of death and despair had fallen over the green, rolling hills of the Upper Five Mile Valley. The idyllic harvests and grazing cattle would now be tended by wives, mothers, the young, and the aged. The creek-fed fields of plenty would forever await the return of the able-bodied men who left their valley for the first and last time.

A New York Soldier

by Walt Whitman

"This afternoon, July 22, I have spent a long time with Oscar F. Wilber, company G, 154th New York, low with chronic diarrhea, and a bad wound also. He asked me to read him a chapter in the New Testament. I complied, and ask'd him what I should read. He said, "Make your own choice." I open'd at the close of one of the first books of the evangelists, and read the chapters describing the latter hours of Christ, and the scenes at the crucifixion. The poor, wasted young man ask'd me to read the following chapter also, how Christ rose again. I read very slowly, for Oscar was feeble. It pleased him very much, yet the tears were in his eyes. He ask'd me if I enjoy'd religion. I said, "Perhaps not, my dear, in the way you mean, and yet, may-be, it is the same thing." He said, "It is my chief reliance." He talk'd of death, and said he did not fear it. I said, "Why, Oscar, don't you think you will get well?" He said, "I may, but it is not probable." He spoke calmly of his condition. The wound was very bad, it discharg'd much. Then the diarrhea had prostrated him, and I felt that he was even then the same as dying. He behaved very manly and affectionate. The kiss I gave him as I was about leaving he return'd fourfold. He gave me his mother's address, Mrs. Sally D. Wilber, Alleghany post-office, Cattaraugus county, N.Y. I had several such interviews with him. He died a few days after the one just described."

Special thank you to the Mark Dunkelman for his contribution of information and for his dedication to the memory of the 154th New York Infantry. Thank you also to the Allegany Area Historical Association, the Library of Congress, the U.S. National Archives, and the National Museum of Health and Medicine.

Spencer Morgan is the son of Dennis and Eileen (Cooney) Morgan, and is a direct descendants of Freeman and Mercy (Kenyon) Wilber and collateral relative of Pvt. Oscar F. Wilber. Spencer has a background in history and museum studies and has been involved with a number of organizations including Citizens Advocating Memorial Preservation, a non-profit group dedicated to the restoration and reuse of the Cattaraugus County Civil War Memorial Building in Little Valley. Spencer is currently an Associate Director of Development at the Fredonia College Foundation, State University of New York at Fredonia. Spencer and his siblings, Scott Morgan, Heather Billings, and Rachel Morgan, grew up in the same house as the Civil War Veteran, Pvt. Milo Wilber. The property abuts the fields that were once the Alanson and Sally Wilber farm, now demolished.

IT'S TIME TO ONCE AGAIN PAY YOUR YEARLY DUES!!!

October is the time to pay your yearly dues. We don't send out reminders to our members since all the members get our newsletter, so we take this method of telling you it is time to renew your membership. We also save postage. Our NEW dues structure is: single membership - \$15 per year; family membership - \$20 per year; patron membership - \$25 or more. Make your check to AAHA and mail it to PO Box 162, Allegany, NY 14706.

If you have paid your dues within the last four months, you are paid for the year. If you don't renew after a reasonable amount of time, we will take you off the mailing list, and nowhere else can you keep up with the happenings of the past and present in your old home town. We value your support -- it enables us to present interesting speakers, and to mount displays of items from our files, such as the World War I exhibit we currently have up.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR NEWSLETTER

Our newsletters are currently mailed out under a bulk mailing permit, which will expire early next year. In an effort to save money, we are going to let it expire and go to a system of sending our newsletters by email. Many other organizations already do this. This will save on printing costs and postage. We realize that many of our members do not have email, so they will continue to get copies of the newsletters as they do now. What we need from our members to make this work is your email address.

So, to receive your newsletter by email, please send your email address to us at:
alleganyheritagecenter@gmail.com.

We are going to begin this service with the **March, 2019** issue.

Memorials

For: Carol Livingston

From: Francie Potter

Rosemary Ryan

Margaret Parker

Cecilia Kelly Ladd

Colleen and Merlin Martin

Carolyn Wing

Alice Altenburg

Hardiman Family

Sam and Sherry Quattrone

John. P. and Jillian Walsh

Mike and Rosanne Capra

Dale and Linda Hastings Conway

Hans and Char Sendlakowski

The Hesse Family

Maggie and Tom Nuss

Bill and Peg Hayes

For: Emeline Belli

From: Harold and Marge Geise

For: John Hesse

From: Francie Potter

*The Chautauqua-Kinzua Chapter of
Harley Owners Group (Falconer, NY)*

Cutco Corp.

Connie Barth

John P. and Jillian Walsh

Peggy Walsh

Kim and Dave Winicki

Cattaraugus SCU-CB

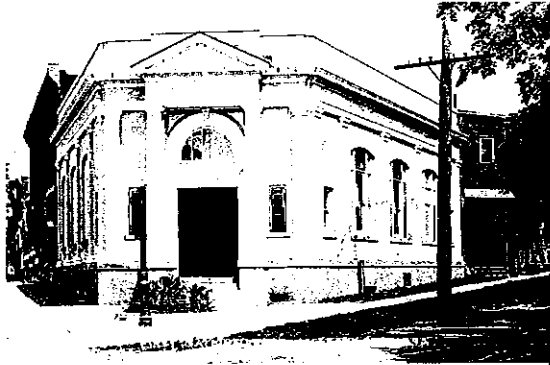
Kathleen Weibel

Betsy Livingston

The following is an oral history of World War II by my late husband, Bob Potter, done while he was a student at the University of Michigan. Oral histories were taken over a period of several years by students of the Media History seminar.

Born in 1931, Robert Potter was a child when World War II began. Still residing in the town in which he grew up, He is able to recall how Allegany, N.Y., a small town 70 miles south of Buffalo, reacted.

We had gone to my grandparents', who lived about 150 miles away. It was a winter's day and we were coming back. I remember the first time I heard it was on the car radio. I wasn't sure what had happened. I asked my parents and they said there was a war that wouldn't last very long. Since Christmas was coming, my thoughts went to that, although I knew the adults were very concerned about the war.



First National Bank, ca. 1940's



Allegany Town Hall, ca. 1940's

I didn't think about the war until the winter of '42. We went down to Florida and stopped at the military bases to visit some family that had been drafted. We had seen some naval training planes landing and taking off. I had seen the military and as a child was quite impressed by it. I thought "this is really kind of neat to have an army" and you knew they were invincible. I thought the war was going to be short and was sure we would win.

My father was either too old, or because of his business, wasn't drafted. He served on the ration board and that was his contribution to the war effort. I had several uncles and one cousin drafted into the army. They would write back. I think it was called V-mail.

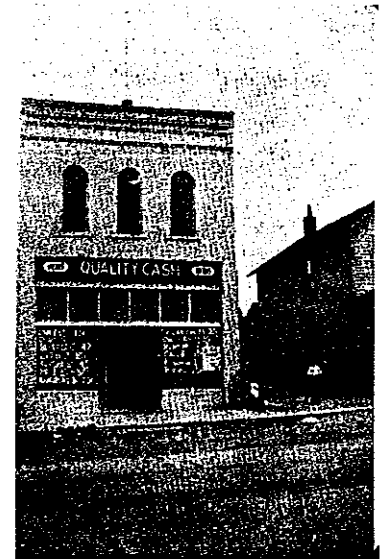
We had never heard of the United States losing and every book we picked up documented how great we were. We had a movie house in town, upstairs over the post office. There were some newsreels which were quite ancient. The movies produced during World War II showed our people fighting the Japanese. We got our impressions of how strong and how good an army we had.

Because there were many people of German extraction in town, we didn't regard the Germans as being quite so bad as the Japanese.

The teachers tried to keep us informed of what was happening in the war, particularly if we were winning. Many programs had to be discontinued, such as shop and some athletics because there was no one there to coach or direct those facets of school life. We were taught what to do in case of air raids. There was a warning system, and we would go home or go under our desks at school. Generally, we would go home. We would bring money to school and buy stamps. When you got enough stamps, you could get a \$25 maturity bond. This was a big thing for us to buy these stamps.

They formed groups of us to do things, like collecting tin cans. We, junior commandos, in the fall collected milkweed pods. They told us the milkweed pods were used for fill in the life jackets in the navy. I guess that was true. (Ed. Note – that was true.) We went out with bags and collected milkweed pods and tin cans.

We had blackouts. They would sound a siren and everyone would turn out their lights. There were neighborhood blackout wardens. My father and the people next door were



Sam Gagliardo's grocery store, 9 E, Main St., 1941



Rawlings Greenhouse
1942

that. They would walk up and down the street and make sure there were no lights showing anywhere. I found that to be exciting and scary; I didn't know how to tell the real from the make-believe.

We played war games. This is a vivid memory. We had armies and would have battles through the back lots. We played at war quite seriously. My best friend had a wooden 30-caliber machine gun that his father made. That alone made us victorious in many of our war games.

We knew the war was going our way from the movies. The local paper had banner headlines about Midway. I can remember reading that. There was so much propaganda, as I look

back now, that we probably didn't know half of what we thought we knew.

Prior to World War II, the mothers of my friends didn't work. By '42 or '43, there was a factory in Allegany called Acme Electric. Many of the women had gone to work there. This I thought was a little strange. My mother didn't work but other mothers were working. I wasn't able to understand why some mothers worked and some didn't.

We had no idea what an atomic bomb was, what it might have done to people. I can remember the headlines. I can't remember having much feeling about it, except I knew it would end the war. We knew it was the right thing to do, or at least we thought so.

There's no doubt that World War II changed my life and made the world smaller. The town of Allegany can never go back to what it was prior to 1941, which was a small country town typical of many.

The radio was the way most people kept up. People didn't travel, but World War II brought soldiers back and made the world a lot smaller. It made people more aware of the problems in the world and aware that we aren't always on the side of right. People I talk to, they look back and see how times have changed, and they use it as a base to say "before World War II" or "after World War II." It's a base of change in their lives and a change in the community.



Rawlings Greenhouse - 5th St. Allegany
L. Elmer Rawlings R. Jack Mead (grandson)

Another memory of early Allegany from Gertrude Schnell.

STONE MASONS

In the early 1900's, probably after 1914, stone masons were working in the Allegany area. They may have been working on bridges, at St. Bonaventure or the cemetery – I never heard.

At that time, they boarded on the farm of my grandmother, Delia Rehler Schnell. This was on the Lower Birch Run Road. In the evening in their free time they fashioned a stone step for the side porch. It was about three feet long and about a foot high. There was also a large stone used to enter the back door and the front steps were originally stone. Where did the stone come from? I don't know but it might have come from the Stone Lot further down on the Lower Birch Run Road.

**Allegany Area Historical Association
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INSIDE SPECIAL ISSUE:

Presidents Report
A New York Soldier
World War II Reminiscence

NEXT MEETING

We will meet on October 14 at 2 p.m. at the Five Mile Cemetery on Church Road, off of the Five Mile Road, for the dedication of a historic marker in honor of Pvt. Oscar Wilber, a civil war soldier.

The historical marker commemorates Pvt. Oscar Wilber and his relationship with Whitman during the climax of the Civil War. Members of the public are invited to participate in a brief commemoration and dedication of the historic roadside marker, which has been funded by the William G. Pomeroy Foundation. The event is hosted by the Allegany Area Historical Association and descendants of Pvt. Wilber.

(See full write-up on page 2)

Special thanks to Spencer Morgan for all the research and planning involved in making the event a reality!

**OCTOBER 14 AT 2 P.M.
AT THE FIVE MILE CEMETERY ON CHURCH ROAD
ALLEGANY, NY**

www.allegany.org