The American Civil War started 150 years ago when Confederate soldiers fired weapons at Union soldiers stationed at Fort Sumter, located in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina. Since that day - April 12, 1861 - the Civil War continues to fascinate people. There seems no end to the stream of new books and movies about the war, and Civil War reenactments take place in communities around the world.

But there is much more to the Civil War than soldiers, weapons, military strategy, and battles. The most important part of the war’s history is the people – the men, women, and children who experienced and were forever affected by the war.

The Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center created *CIVIL WAR: Battlefield & Homefront* to tell the stories of a particular group of people – citizens of Northern Ohio. The exhibit is special because it uses the actual words of the people who lived at the time to explain what the Civil War was like.

It was very common for people who lived in the 19th Century to keep diaries and to write letters to each other. Since there were no computers or telephones, letters were the main way to communicate. Whether it was President Lincoln giving orders to his generals, or a wife sharing news from home with her soldier husband, pencil and paper were all important.

This is very lucky for us. Those letters, as well as diaries, provide us with facts and details about the war that otherwise never would have been known.

*CIVIL WAR: Battlefield & Homefront* lets you learn about the war by reading words written by those who experienced it. The letters, diaries, photographs and personal items you see in the exhibit are from the Center’s collections and the L.M. Strayer Collection. The latter is a collection owned and preserved by a person who has studied the Civil War since he was very young. He loaned the Center some of his collection for this exhibit. Many items never have been on display before.

If your family always has lived in Northern Ohio, you may be related to some of the people whose stories are part of the exhibit. Both General Ralph Buckland and Dr. John B. Rice were from Fremont. Cpt. Alvah Skilton of Monroeville had one of the most harrowing and interesting war experiences as he escaped from Confederate prisons twice during a year-long odyssey. Lt. Georg Northon and Lt. Will Parmelee both of Toledo served together in the 1st Ohio Light Artillery, Battery H. General James M. McPherson, the highest ranking Union officer killed in the war, never returned to his Clyde home. Both Jeremiah Whetsel of McCutchenville and Isaac Ellison of Seneca County fought racism as well as the enemy. At a time when just volunteering to be a soldier could have cost them their lives, they served in the U.S. Colored Troops, taking a stand against slavery and for their country.

*CIVIL WAR: Battlefield & Homefront* is made possible through sponsorship from Diversified Insurance and Auto-Owners Insurance. It is on display exclusively in the Hayes Museum April 12, 2011 through January 29, 2012. Additional funding is provided by Croghan Colonial Bank.
Preserving the stories of Ohio soldiers

A trip to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania when he was age 10 set Larry Strayer on a life-long journey of researching the Civil War. Larry’s goal is to better understand the war’s history by collecting Civil War artifacts.

“My mother was an antiques dealer. My Dad collected decoys. My grandfather was a coin collector. So I went around with them. By the time I was 12, I was a pretty dedicated collector,” he said.

In high school Larry made regular visits to a flea market at the Woodville Mall in Toledo, where he found a low-cost source for his collecting. “I bought carte de visites [a type of photograph] for 25 cents and a dime each … 25 cents for a full-length photograph.”

His treasured purchases were stored in a wooden Civil War footlocker given to him by a kindly neighbor who knew of his hobby. “She was a descendant of a Kentucky Union officer. Her grandfather was a quartermaster in the 8th Kentucky Infantry. He shipped food home to his large family in the footlocker during the war,” said Larry.

Such objects inspired him to learn more about the people who owned them. Larry began narrowing his collection focus to Civil War soldiers from Ohio. He then set a goal of gathering collection groupings. In other words, buying not only objects owned by a person, but also letters they had written and photographs taken of them.

His “McMeens grouping” provides a unique biography of Erie County surgeon Robert R. McMeens. Larry has collected the doctor’s Civil War issue cot, surgeon’s trunk, tin cups, photographs, letters, and surgeon’s kit. He is touched by the doctor’s dedication to injured Union soldiers. Doctor McMeens refused rest as a stream of wounded poured into his hospital after the Battle of Perryville. McMeens died of exhaustion while administering to casualties.

Larry’s “Baird grouping” tells the stories of brothers John and Darius Baird of Pulaski, Ohio. Both men were in the 38th Regiment, Company H. Darius served in the Color Guard, and John as regimental Fife Major. Darius was killed at the Battle of Jonesboro. The grouping includes original photographs of both, John’s pistol, knapsack, canteen, haversack, fork and knife, and Darius’ blanket, canteen and tin cup.

“John was mustered out in late September and his brother was killed in early September. So, John had the opportunity to carry these items out and bring them home. Otherwise, they would have been left somewhere,” said Larry.

“If you are into collecting artifacts of the common soldier, something like the tin cup a soldier carried during the war – and you can authenticate that he carried it – is something you just don’t find often. When you see a three-dimensional artifact that somebody handled, it’s tangible.”

When not occupied with his job as a legal research associate, Larry searches for items to add to his collection. His task has gotten harder as Civil War artifacts have increased in value and time to takes its toll on fragile items now 150 years old.

The Hayes Presidential Center is honored to include a large number of items from Larry’s collection in its new exhibit, CIVIL WAR: Battlefield & Homefront.

Civilian outrage forced the Army to defend soldiers against disease

Civilians deserve the credit for one of the most significant military improvements that came out of the Civil War. It was people on homefront who pressured the war department to create the United States Sanitary Commission.

The word sanitation means “relating to public health, especially the provision of clean drinking water and adequate sewage disposal.” Today, we all take for granted that our water is safe to drink and that human waste is treated in sewer systems. During the war, this was not the case. Diseases and sicknesses resulting from bad water and raw sewage were made worse by the fact that war brought together large numbers of people (soldiers) in small areas. Whether living together in camps or being cared for in crowded hospitals, soldiers were more likely to die from illness than from bullets.

A widespread national network of volunteers that included church groups, ladies’ societies, clergymen, doctors, and lawyers recognized the problems and set about improving the lives of soldiers. They made and collected goods (food, bandages, and warm clothing) and established a system to distribute them to the soldiers. These civilians also pressured the U.S. Army to do something about sanitation problems, leading to establishment of the U.S. Sanitary Commission on June 9, 1861.

Serving against all Odds

Sandusky County enlistment records show 23 men and Erie County records list 15 men as having served in the United States Colored Troops (USCT).

However, very little is known about them and almost no photographs have been located. Many of these men traveled great distances to come to Northern Ohio to enlist in units open to African Americans. A few men listed places of birth on their enlistment papers, hinting that some - from Virginia, Tennessee, and Mississippi - may have been recently freed slaves. Other recruits had established businesses in the North. They were farmers, barbers, and shopkeepers.

These men endured not only the brutality of combat but also racism. They served with dignity and loyalty, quickly silencing those who did not believe African Americans would do well as soldiers. The photo (center) is Sgt. Nathaniel Stevens, Company E 28th USCT. It is one of the few images of a USCT soldier in uniform.

Although Stevens was from Urbana, Ohio, he is an ancestor of Charles Weiker of Fremont, who loaned the photo to the Hayes Presidential Center.
The War on the Homefront

Women carved out their own ways to serve

When President Abraham Lincoln issued a call for men to enlist in the Civil War, there was a rush of volunteers from Northern Ohio. There was no shortage of young men determined to prove themselves on the battlefield. But, there also was an abundance of men who had wives, children, and established careers. It was when these older men went off to battle that the war truly came to the Homefront.

Before the Civil War, women did not have jobs. Men were the sole providers for their families. When the men left to be soldiers, many women had to find a way to support their family, tend to the farm or business, and take care of the house and property. Women whose husbands had earned enough money to carry the family comfortably through the war often turned their attention to supporting the soldiers. They collected fabric and rolled it into bandages for use in hospitals, raised money to buy uniforms and equipment, and volunteered in many other ways.

- Lucy Hayes’ natural kindness to others led to her role of “Mother” to the men of the 23rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry. During her long visits with her husband in camp, Lucy tended to soldiers who were sick or wounded, helped them write letters home, and mended their tattered clothing using the sewing machine she brought with her to camp.

- Even when she was at home in Cincinnati caring for four small children, Lucy found time to help soldiers. A portion of a letter she wrote to Rutherford on May 19, 1862, reveals much about the type of person Lucy was:

  Dearest,

  …Our hospitals are all full of sick and wounded. A great difference can be seen between the sick and wounded. The sick appear low-spirited - down cast, while the wounded are quite cheerful hoping to be well. I felt right happy the other day, feeling that I had made some persons feel a little happier. Going down to Mrs Herron’s I passed four soldiers, two wounded and two sick. They were sitting on the pavement in front of the office where their passes are given to them. I passed them then thought, well, anyhow, I will go back and ask them where they are going. A gentleman, who I saw then was with them, said he had just got in from Camp Dennison, and found they were too late to get their tickets for that evening. I asked “Where will you take them?” He said he did not know, but must get them to the nearest place, as they were very weak. I said, “Doctor (the wounded man had told me he was his family doctor and had come to take him home), if you will take them to my house I will gladly keep them and have them taken to the cars. There is the streetcar which will take you near my house.” He was very thankful, and we put sick and wounded on, and I started them for Sixth Street, while I finished my errand, took the next car, and found my lame men hobbling slowly along. We fixed them in the back parlor. The doctor I asked to stay also, to attend to them. He said he could not thank me enough, that he was a stranger here and was almost bewildered as to what to do or where to take them. Mary was up early and we had a cup of coffee for them before five.

- Feisty Anna C. McMeens was equally determined to share the hardships her husband Dr. Robert McMeens was sure to suffer, and to be in a place where she could do the most good. She went with Robert to Camp Dennison, Ohio, spending all of her time in the military hospital caring for the soldiers. When the regiment was ordered to Nashville, Tennessee, Anna went along. She continued to serve as a nurse until Robert died from over-exertion treating wounded from the Battle of Perryville. Now a widow, Anna returned to Sandusky, Ohio, but could not endure the inactivity of being in mourning. She soon became involved with the Sanitary Commission, helping to get supplies for military hospitals. However, Anna wanted to do more. She finally found her calling working in the hospitals in Washington, D.C., where she tended to soldiers.

- The death of her husband Lt. Col. Herman Canfield at the Battle of Shiloh made Martha Treat Canfield acutely aware of people’s need to be comforted. That empathy and her friendship with Julia Grant enabled Martha to keep close ties with her husband’s regiment, the 72nd Ohio. Martha followed the regiment from one battlefield to the next, taking on the role of nurse, minister, and mother to the men. While visiting military hospitals in Memphis and Vicksburg, Martha was outraged at the number of soldiers dying from lack of clean water, food, and care. She contacted Ohio’s governor, hundreds of aid societies, and General Ulysses S. Grant to get help for the soldiers. With donations from her fellow Ohioans, Martha was able to set up a hospital ship at Vicksburg and a water system at the Memphis military hospital.

Today, sports teams often make T-shirts that list their accomplishments. The shirt backs list games won, tournaments played, and the league the team is part of. After the Civil War, many Union soldiers did something similar. They had artists create large colorful shields on paper that in words and symbols told of their military service. These elaborate creations are called escutcheons. A soldier’s escutcheon (pronounced es-cut-shun) usually was framed and proudly displayed in his home.

President Rutherford B. Hayes and his one-time law partner Ralph P. Buckland each had escutcheons. General Buckland’s escutcheon is pictured above. The upper left corner of the shield shows that Buckland earned the ranks of Lt. Colonel, Colonel, Brigadier General, and Major General. The upper right contains insignia of the 72nd Infantry (the regiment Buckland commanded) and of the U.S. Army Staff. At the lower left are the badges of the Corps that were part of Buckland’s regiment. The lower right contains pennants of the 15th and 16th Corps. [Note: Businesses selling escutcheons were more concerned about sales than accuracy. For example, Buckland did not serve or command the 14th Corps. There also are other errors.]

Contained inside the cross shape is a history of Buckland’s service – units he commanded, battles he was in, and injuries he suffered. The center of the cross contains the Great Seal of Ohio, circa 1866.

The escutcheons of General Buckland and President Hayes are part of the Hayes Presidential Center Collections.
KIDS on the battlefield, homefront, in-between

At the time the Civil War started, more than one third of people living in the Northern states were children. Children were affected by the war as much as the adults. Fortunately for us, a few young people took the time to record their experiences (in letters or diaries) during the war years. These amazing written accounts reveal how deeply children felt about the conflict and how they acted on those feelings.

James A. Dickinson of Fremont was only 13 years old and wanted only one thing – to be a soldier. He knew he was too young. So, James ran away. He soon found that the friends who promised to enlist with him had backed out. James stayed true to his desire. Although he was rejected by the Army (due to his small size), he was able to enlist in the U.S. Navy.

We know all these facts and more because James wrote about his experiences in a diary. While still going through the enlistment process in Cleveland, James made the following diary entries:

May 18th 1863. I and another fellow named Douglas Cannon, who came from Erie and enlisted, went to a store and had our measures taken for a suit of Navy clothes. I enlisted under Lieutenant Bottle as powder monkey for the term of service of one year. One of the boys who enlisted a few day ago is a girl. Lt. Bottle sent her home when I told him she was a woman.

May 21st 1863. I received my Navy clothes to-day. They fit one tip-top. I sold my old clothes to a Jew and got $1.50 for them and I spent it right off. I went up to Aunt Ellen’s house to-day and saw her and Nellie and Marshy. Went down to the Lake shore this afternoon and had the rules and regulations of the Navy read to us. They are pretty tough.

Nine-year-old Katie Huntington did not have to leave home to experience the war. The Cincinnati girl was witness to the only time Confederate soldiers came into Ohio during the Civil War - Morgan’s Raid. Katie was in Glendale, Ohio, on July 13, 1863, when word came that Confederate General John Hunt Morgan and his cavalry entered Ohio near the Hamilton-Butler County line. Morgan led his men to the outskirts of Cincinnati, where they spent the night of July 13 in sight of the Union Army’s Camp Dennison.

The next morning Katie wrote a letter to her father, explaining how her curiosity turned to fear as soldiers entered the town. This is part of that letter:

Last night I went to bed earlier than usual and about two o’clock in the morning while I was asleep John Morgan (but I don’t think he deserves the name John) and about three thousand of his troops passed through Glendale right by the College and about half a dozen of them went into the barn and took Mr. Drake’s horse (it was a very fine one the nicest one in the barn).

This morning I went down to the depot and Mrs. Fox and Elisa were down there and I said that I wouldn’t go home then for anything because if there was going to be a mob I should like to see it. Just then a man rode up on a white horse and said that some rebels were coming in full gallop and another man that was there said ladies and children take care out of the way because they may fire and Mrs. Fox took 7 or 8 of the children in to her house and told the girl to lock the house all up and we all went up in the garret and looked out of the garret windows and Mrs. Fox made us all be still for fear that we would attract attention to the house.

You may not know that children often visited their soldier fathers during the war. Often, the entire family would pack up to spend a month or more in camp. This was especially common if the father of the family was an officer. Rutherford B. Hayes’ son Webb Hayes spent nearly seven months living in his father’s Civil War camps during visits with his mother Lucy and his brothers. During one visit, Webb’s younger brother died from dysentery while at the camp.

General Ralph P. Buckland of Fremont also endured the death of a child during a family visit to his Civil War camp. His 15-year-old daughter Carrie Buckland, along with her mother and brother George, traveled to Memphis, Tennessee. Carrie had closely followed the war’s progress and did her part to support Union soldiers by hosting fundraisers to provide food, blankets and bandages. The trip would be her chance to see the effects of the war and to experience what life was like in camp. Unfortunately Carrie fell victim to an enemy that killed more soldiers than were killed in battle – disease. The teenager fell ill with “camp fever” and died within days. General Buckland was inconsolable.

You’ve got what?

Names for sicknesses have changed since the days of the Civil War. Here’s a look at

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<th>THEN</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dyspepsia</td>
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<td>Enteric Fever</td>
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<td>Rubeola</td>
<td>measles</td>
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<td>Piles</td>
<td>hemorrhoids</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dysentery</td>
<td>any intestinal ailment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neuralgia</td>
<td>nerve pain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remit Fever</td>
<td>fever that comes &amp; goes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Camp Fever</td>
<td>term for all continuing fevers: Typhoid, Malarial, Remittent, and Typho-Malarial fevers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bilious Fever</td>
<td>fever w/ nausea, vomiting, &amp; diarrhea</td>
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<td>Consumption</td>
<td>Tuberculosis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dropsy</td>
<td>edema (fluid in cells)</td>
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<td>Catarrh</td>
<td>a cold</td>
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This publication and more information about the Civil War is available at www.rbhayes.org