

A stone for Civil War soldier

By Karen Dandurant, Exeter News Letter. May 1, 2001.

NEWFIELDS — Horace's quotes should stay the same, including spelling On June 23, 1861, Horace Ober Smith wrote: "I belong to the 2nd NH Regiment. I enlisted in Exeter May 4th with 11 others from South Newmarket. We staid there three weeks liveing in high style. Drilling three hours a day. The rest of the time we spent wroling ten pins and driveing fast horses.

"The twenty fifth we went to Portsmouth which was the rendezvous for the Regt. with about fifty others. We did not have so much liberty there to go around. For as soon as we got into quarters we could not get out by the guard without a pass. It came very hard at first but after a while we got used to it.

"After we had been in Portsmouth about a week we was put into a company commanded by Capt. Leonard Drown. He is a good officer and I think if the men use him well he will do the same to them. But Woe to the man who disobeys orders for he will show them no mercy.

"After coming under his command we went up into the city and was sworn into the United States service for the period of three years, if not sooner discharged."

Horace Ober Smith was a private in Company E, 2nd NH Regiment during the Civil War.



Helen Smith holds a photo of Civil War soldier Horace Ober Smith, her husband's grandfather, next to Smith's grave in Newfields.

Staff photo by Emily Reily

Smith was born March 26, 1842, and died Jan. 30, 1924, at the age of 82.

It's now 2001, and South Newmarket is Newfields. Helen and Maureen Smith have arranged a special tribute for their long deceased ancestor.

The Civil War veteran never received a gravestone.

This year's Memorial Day celebration in Newfields will include the dedication of a Civil War replica gravestone, courtesy of Uncle Sam, a long overdue tribute to a man who served his country 140 years ago.

The event will take place May 26, after the parade, which begins at 11 a.m. and will end up in the Newfields Cemetery, at Horace's resting place.

Horace is Helen's grandfather by marriage, and Maureen's great-grandfather. It was Maureen who found a way to obtain the gravestone for Horace. "Before he died, my husband Carl used to always say, 'I wish I could get a stone for my grandfather,'" Helen said.

So, Maureen went high-tech to solve an old problem. She went online and found out the government would provide the stone, free of charge.

"I logged on to the U.S. Veterans Affairs Division," Maureen said. "We had to prove that he was in the Civil War, and that he was really buried in the cemetery here. The first was easy; we have all his papers. For the second, they had to take the word of the caretaker; we certainly weren't about to dig him up!"

Maureen said she took on the task out of love for her father. She calls it her "memorial" to him. "When he got sick, he said he wanted to make it to his 50th wedding anniversary, and see the year 2000," Maureen said. "He did both, so this I wanted to do for him."

The Smiths live on the same property Horace did. The original house was lost to a fire, but the land has been in the family for generations.

The Smiths have a treasure trove of Civil War memorabilia from Horace. They have the original tintype photo of his enlistment, plus a large, sienna-tone reproduction of the photo that was made later. They have his enlistment papers, copies of his war records, his pension papers, rifle, sword, canteen, coins, belt buckle, and his compass, which still works.

Perhaps the most impressive thing the Smiths have is Horace's diary. He kept a journal from the day he enlisted, until his discharge on June 22, 1864, after being wounded in the battle at Williamsburg. Later, he tracked the men in his company and provided a look at who lived and who never made it home.

His diary is fragile now. The pages must be handled with care. The writing is in a beautiful script and provides a window to a time available now only through history books. Horace's diary brings the Civil War alive.

Included in the diary is a verbatim documentation of Maj. Gen. George McLellan's address to the Army of the Potomac. The Smiths said they were watching a special on PBS about the Civil War and were startled to find the content of the show mirroring Horace's diary when they spoke of McLellan.

For anyone interested, the Smiths are working to put Horace's diary onto a Web page. They have begun, and it can be found by typing the name Horace Ober Smith into a Web search engine.

On July 8, 1861, Smith wrote of an inspection by President Abraham Lincoln.

He said, "The boys was drawn up in a line this morning and marched down to the city. There we passed in review before the president marching by the White House. He stood on the piasa, hat in hand. The band played Hail Columbia. I never saw our boys march better than they did there. The moment I saw Mr. Lincoln, I knew him. He looks very much like the pictures taken of him but a great deal better."

On May 4, 1862, Smith was at Yorktown. He said the regiments were 125,000 strong.

"We was called out at 4 a.m., there was movement in the enemy lines and the artillery is playing away. We are about two miles away and are nearest to them (rebels) than any division except a regiment of sharpshooters."

He wrote that guns boomed all night long.

It was on May 4th Horace received the wound that resulted in discharge.

"My company was sent ahead as skirmishers. At 7 am., the first shot was fired and we commenced the battle. We advanced through the swamp to firm ground."

Smith described a stand of fallen trees, which he speculated the rebels intended to set on fire to halt the Union march. It was as Smith was picking his way through the fallen trees that it happened.

"We met the Rebs in the fallen timber. Our brigade fought alone. Here we fought against five times our own number, sometimes driving them and other times being driven. About 11 a.m., as I was advancing through the timber a Reb rose up. Almost before I could think, there a gun at my breast. I grasped his gun and muzzle and thrust it aside. With my right hand I drew my revolver as quick as thought and put a ball through his breast at the same moment as his gun discharged. The ball passed through my thumb, splitting it to the first joint but doing no other injury. My shot did more. He lay down and found it difficult to breathe. My work was done for the day."

Horace found a field hospital where his wound was dressed. He was sent by "ambulance" with other wounded on a ride to Fort Perkins.

"We went about four miles (miles), when the horses got stuck in mud and we had to lay there till 9 a.m. Some have died on the way to Fort Perkins."

The government provided Horace with the princely pension of \$1 a month, and he was retired from the service.

A timeless yet simple observation is one Horace made on May 5, 1862. He wrote, "Death is certain, but life is uncertain." He was writing about the death of a friend in his regiment, but his comment represents the stark reality of war, as does the roster at the back of his diary:

Nathan Kuse — killed at Gettysburg;

Daniel Smith — killed at Bull Run;

Frank Trefethen — died in service.

There were five Smiths in the roster, all family members, some Clarks and Watermans, in case anyone's looking into his or her own ancestry.