

The Glen Cove Militia Receives Their Flag

Days after the first shots of the Civil War are fired, the Glen Cove militia (Company E of the 15th New York State Militia) are presented with a company flag hand-sewn by the patriotic women of Glen Cove.

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On a clear spring afternoon in May of 1861, only a month after the outbreak of the Civil War, the ladies of Glen Cove presented the local militia company with a hand-sewn silk company flag in a patriotic ceremony in Union Square at the corner of Cottage Row and School Street.

Barely a year and a half old, Company E of the 15th Regiment of New York State Militia had been formed to protect the community in the event of war. The birth of Company E can be traced back to a public meeting held to organize a military company in Glen Cove in November, 1859. (GC Gazette, 1859a) Even as the editor of Glen Cove pronounced the thought of the dissolution of the United States by the secession of the disaffected Southern states was merely a “humbug,” (GC Gazette, 1859b) it was clear to many that the possibility of war between the states was becoming a reality.

At a meeting of the new but nameless military company on 13 December, 1859 the members of the unit elected Stephen B Craft, a 28 year farmer, as their Captain. The other officers of the company were John Birdsall as 1st Lieutenant, William M Weeks as 2nd Lieutenant and David Paxton at Sergeant.

Initially, the members of the company considered joining with a similar company of militia then being formed in Oyster Bay to create a regiment tentatively named the “Long Island Guard”. However, it was discovered that if the two companies merged to form an independent regiment the men would have to provide their own muskets... while if they instead became part of an regiment of New York State Militia, the government would provide them with rifles. (GC Gazette, 1859c) It was therefore decided that the unit would become part of the 15th Regiment of

New York State Militia, also known as the “Hamilton Rifles”. This regiment, named for commanding officer Colonel (later General) Charles A Hamilton, was a well established Queens County regiment that originated in Flushing in 1849.

Designated as Company E of the 15th Regiment of New York State Militia, the Glen Cove unit was small. There were only three officers and about 29 enlisted men. (While an infantry company theoretically consists of 100 men, with 10 companies forming a regiment of 1,000 men, in the era of the Civil War few military companies were at full strength. Some historians estimate that on average, companies contained as few as 35 men even in units on active field service.) The other five companies scattered throughout Queens County were similar in size, however, with only the Oyster Bay company with 3 officers and 34 enlisted men being larger.

On April 12, 1861, the much-feared war between the states finally erupted when Confederate artillery batteries began to bombard Fort Sumpter, a Union-held fortification on a small island off Charleston, South Carolina.

With war at hand, Eugene M Lincoln, editor of the Glen Cove Gazette, suggested that the women of Glen Cove organized themselves into a “Union Aid Society.” Similar organizations were being formed throughout the North, to provide local soldiers headed off to war with those necessities and niceties which the government failed to provide, or provided in too little quantity. These included items as flannel shirts, extra socks, handkerchiefs, coffee, and tobacco

One of the first projects the women decided upon was to create a company flag for Company E of the 15th Regiment.

Accordingly, with characteristic energy, for our ladies are famous for carrying through whatever they undertake, the funds were raised, the material purchased and the flag made; and a very handsome one it is, and of which the Company may feel well proud. (GC Gazette, 1861a)

The flag was “made of blue silk, trimmed with white fringe of the same rich material, and to preserve the unity of colors, a beautiful red rosette is placed on either side of the extreme lower corner.” Embroidered on the flag in white letters was:

**Comp E Hamilton Rifles
15th Regiment
N Y S M**

The flag was attached to a “polished rosewood staff, surmounted by a glittering spear” from which hung red, white, and blue silk ribbons.

On the afternoon of Saturday, May 12th, 1861 the officers and enlisted men of Company E and “a large number of ladies and gentlemen” of Glen Cove gathered at Glen Hall, a building on modern-day School Street which served as the community’s meeting hall, dance hall, banquet hall, and lecture hall. Together they marched to Union Square for the presentation ceremony. Located at the intersection of Cottage Row, School Street, Brewster Street and North Lane, “Union Square” had been the site where, a few weeks previously, the patriotic residents of Glen Cove had erected a Liberty Pole surmounted with a large United States flag to show their support of the Union cause. The site is today the



A typical Union Zouave wearing the traditional jacket and cap.



One possible reconstruction of the flag presented to Company E

better known as “Vinnie’s Island,” and stands only a few yards from where the City of Glen Cove has brigaded together most of the community’s war memorials.

Miss Addie Jackson appeared costumed as the “Goddess of Liberty” – “most richly and tastefully dressed in character, partially draped in the beautiful folds of a beautiful Star Spangled Banner”. One observer noted that “the beauty, grace and demeanor of the ‘Goddess’ were very much admired” by the onlookers. She was flanked by two children carry the new flag furled around its rosewood staff.

Following the Goddess of Liberty were seventeen boys wearing “Zouave caps and Union scarfs” and seventeen girls dressed in white “white skirts, red Zouave jackets and [red Zouave] caps” to represent the thirty four states (even though several states – South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, and Arkansas – had already seceded from the Union). [The “Zouave jacket” was a vest-like jacket with sleeves, and the “Zouave cap” was a fez, both derived from the uniform of Algerian troops recruited by the French army in the 1830’s. The fierceness of these Berber tribesman in battle had captivated the American public’s imagination, and during the Civil War numerous regiments both Union and confederate were uniformed in Zouave uniforms. (One of the most famous regiments was the 5th New York Infantry, also known as Durvea’s Zouaves, commanded by Hiram Durvea of Glen Cove).]

Rev. Thomas Mallaby of St Paul’s Episcopal Church of Glen Cove gave a brief prayer. The Glen Cove Cornet Band, then one of the village’s newest musical institutions, performed an appropriate selection of music for the occasion.

Dr Joseph S Morrell, one of Glen Cove’s leading physicians, gave a speech formally presenting the new flag to Company E. During the presidential campaign of 1860, Morrell had been an ardent supporter of Abraham Lincoln, and had been head of the Glen Cove Wide-Awakes (a pro-Lincoln marching society).

As Miss Jackson handed the flag to Capt. Craft, local store-keeper Jacob M Weeks lead the thirty four children representing the thirty four states of the Union in a rousing rendition of the Star Spangled Banner “in an admirable manner.”

A few “excellent short patriotic speeches” were made by

local dignitaries, including Stephen Augustus Cock, who would later serve in the Civil War and afterwards would practice law in Virginia; Dr James C Townsend, physician and President of the Glen Cove Mutual Insurance Co.; Townsend Wilmot Cock, President of the New York Gold Exchange, who owned a large estate on West Island in Glen Cove; and David Rogers, who operated a private lunatic asylum on his estate on East Island and who would later be placed in charge of the Queens County Lunatic Asylum. The Glen Cove Cornet Band played a few more musical numbers, followed by the children singing the “Red, White and Blue” (more properly known as “Columbia Gem of the Ocean”) and “America ‘Tis of Thee” (more popularly known as “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” today, although it was usually called “America” during the Civil War era).

At the end of the ceremony, Capt. Craft and the men of Company E, along with the gathered citizenry, formed a procession through the streets of downtown Glen Cove before dispersing and returning to their homes.

An anonymous resident stated in a letter to the editor of the Glen Cove Gazette:

The tasteful arrangements, the beautiful day, the picturesque appearance of the children, the excellent music, the good speaking, the large audience numbering at least a thousand, formed a scene which was very impressive, and most enthusiastically admired, and which will be remembered as the finest display of the kind which has been seen upon this part of Long Island. (GC Gazette, 1861a)

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