

A Hard Road To Travel – From Connecticut to Gettysburg 1863

Four Comrades from Connecticut

James Henry Blakeman

Farmer, Oronoke, Stratford, CT

Born November 20, 1841

Died September 21, 1918



J. Henry Blakeman photographed in his private's uniform from the William Warren Manuscript courtesy of the Bridgeport Public Library

James Henry Blakeman, preferred to use his middle name, probably to distinguish him from his father, also James, and the four generations of James Blakemans before him. He was the fifth of that name. He was described upon enlistment at 20 8/12 years of age, 5 feet 9 inches in height, with a fair complexion, blue eyes and brown hair. Henry and Selah Blakeman were cousins. They would remain close throughout their

service and throughout their lives. The Blakeman family traced their roots to one of the original founders of Stratford, CT. Henry Blakeman's military roots went back to his grandfather another James Blakeman. In 1889 during the 250th Anniversary of the founding of Stratford he would be listed in the 250th anniversary publication as allowing the cavalry saber carried by his grandfather during the Revolution to be exhibited. By that time, Henry would have his own military record to be proud of and would be considered one of the leading citizens of Stratford, CT. Upon his enlistment in 1862, and throughout his entire life, he would list his profession as farmer as would his cousin Selah. It is a fair assumption that he and his friends would enlist in the 17th Connecticut Regiment out of patriotism. This would come through in his, Selah's, and Stephen's letters. The two cousins had distinctly different writing styles and Henry's letters would be descriptive and gossipy, while Selah's would often be more prosaic and to the point. Henry's best friend was Stephen Crofut. The two would grow up together in Oronoke quite close. Family ties were extensive and intertwined and difficult to untangle. They extending for the Blakemans and other families connected to them throughout Stratford and the Corum section of Huntington.

Henry would survive the war despite being terribly wounded the first day at Gettysburg. He would return home to marry his sweetheart Miss Amelia J. Burr of Stepney (Monroe) CT, in 1866. He would write to her throughout the war addressing her as Dearest Nina. After the war Henry was active in civic and veteran affairs. He was a prominent citizen in Stratford and the State until his death in 1917 during the First World War when one obituary would describe him as the "dean of public men in Fairfield County."



A detail of the 1867 Beers map of Stratford showing the district of Oronoke that the Blakemans and the Crofuts inhabited situated along the Housatonic River. The homes and farms are all gone. The area, now spelled Oronoque, today is multiple commercial use properties. The land across the river from the Blakeman farms and homes is now the huge Sikorsky Aircraft plant and parking lots.

Stephen C. Crofut

Fisherman, Oronoke, Stratford, CT

Born August 29, 1841

Died July 1, 1863



An pre-war cased ambrotype of Stephen Curtis Crofut, *courtesy of the Shelton Historical Socitey*

Handsome Stephen Crofut would enlist along with his friends in July of 1862 for a term of three years or the duration of the war. He was twenty years old, 5 feet 10 inches in height with a fair complexion and brown eyes and dark hair. He, Henry, and Selah would be born within months of each other in 1841. Stephen's family had ties to Huntington and the Valley up the river from Oronoke. Stephen was born in Huntington, CT. The Oronoke district of Stratford is adjacent to the Corum district of Huntington. Stephen was mustered into the 17th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry as a private on August 28, 1862 at Camp Aiken in Bridgeport (now Seaside Park in Bridgeport). Stephen was immediately reported as absent and sick in Stratford by September 1, 1862 on the muster roll. On September 3 when the regiment left the state for Baltimore, MD Stephen remained behind. He was reported absent from duty and sick at home for over three months until he rejoined his company in December 1862. Once reporting for duty he would be present on the company muster rolls until he was listed killed in action the first day at Gettysburg on July

1, 1863. His body was never recovered and he is most probably one of the unknown Connecticut dead interred in the National Cemetery at Gettysburg.

Reading through the pension claim that Stephen's mother filed 1879 it becomes apparent that his death was the beginning of a multiple tragedy for his family. It also leads the reader to speculate on the nature of Stephen's illness. In the 19th century before the advent of the social welfare system we know today, economic desperation stalked families. According to the testimony of Mrs. Sarah Crofut and her nearest neighbor, Henry Johnson, in the pension application, Stephen's father Samuel was partially disabled from gout and rheumatism. Samuel Crofut was described in an affidavit as "not able to do anything three fourths of the time" and at times unable to work. He had a right to fish in a shad fishery along the Housatonic River and was often unable to tend to the family's fishing business. The home where the Crofuts lived was described as a small farm on four acres and its value materially decreased since the war by the time Mrs. Crofut filed her pension claim. Stephen was essentially the family's sole support. It is easy to speculate that his illness might have been prompted by the necessity of providing for his family.

When he finally left for his regiment in November 1862, he left with his mother all of the bounty money he received for enlisting and all of the money he earned fishing. The family was dependent on the small amounts from the fishery and the money Stephen could send back home. He is not reported on the muster rolls again as sick or missing from duty. When he finally joined his regiment he must have remained well, or at least avoided being reported as ill. The tragic effect of Stephen's death at Gettysburg,

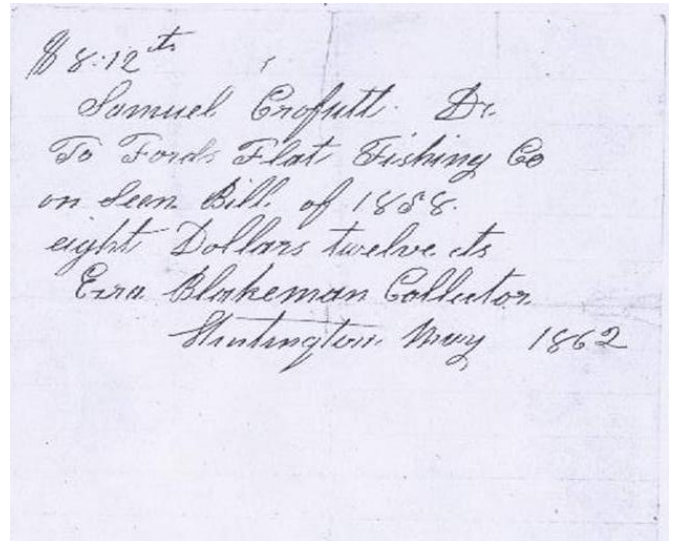


Stephen Crofut from a glass slide copy of an original pre war photograph possibly an ambrotype or cdv, *courtesy of the Derby Historical Society, Bradley Slide Collection*

July 1, 1863 caused not only the emotional devastation for parents losing a child but spelled doom for the family's economic situation. The pension affidavit states that during 1863 the earnings of his father Samuel C. Crofut amounted to nothing except the fishery in the spring of the year.

On August 15, 1865 tragedy would strike the family again when Samuel Crofut was killed instantly in a collision on the Housatonic Rail Road at Stepney (Monroe, CT). The collision was described in Harper's Weekly, September 2, 1865 as the Housatonic Railroad Slaughter and was accompanied by two woodcuts depicting the horrific tragedy. The pension that Mrs.

Crofut desperately needed amounted to \$12 a month as compensation for the death of her son in battle.



Handwritten document on aged paper with a grid pattern. The text is written in cursive ink. At the top left, it says '\$8.12^{ts}'. The main text reads: 'Samuel Crofut. Dr. To Fords Flat Fishing Co on Loan Bill. of 1858. eight Dollars twelve cts Era Blakeman Collector Huntington, May 1862'.

Right: Tax document for Samuel Crofut on the Fords Flat Fishing Company dated May 1862, three months before Stephen's Enlistment. *Courtesy of Robert Kullberg*

Sylvester Rounds
Carpenter, Lower White Hills, Huntington, CT
Born April 26, 1843
Died February, 18, 1899

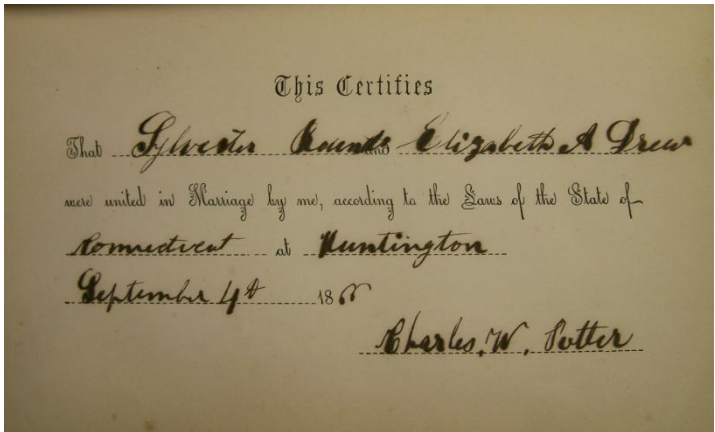


The homes of Levi Rounds (right) and Sylvester Rounds (left) as they appear today in the Lower White Hills section of Huntington. The homes of father and son are listed across from each other on the 1867 Beers map of Huntington.

Photo courtesy of the author

No photograph of Sylvester Rounds has yet been found. He was the youngest of the four friends, born in 1843 in Uniondale, PA. In 1847 when Sylvester was four years old his parents, Levi Rounds and Catherine Hubbell would move to the White Hills section of Huntington, CT. Perhaps Catherine had ties to the many Hubbells who resided in the White Hills and the family moved there to be with Connecticut kin. When Sylvester Rounds enlisted in the 17th Connecticut Regiment his home was listed as the Lower White Hills in Huntington. He, Selah, Henry and Stephen would be together almost daily. They would see combat at Chancellorsville and narrowly escape capture. On July 1, 1863 the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg, Sylvester would be wounded badly by a rifle ball to the left shoulder and he would be taken prisoner. He was probably wounded in the same volley that killed Stephen and also badly wounded Henry. Syl Rounds, as he was called by his friends, would spend months in various hospitals and never return to the regiment. He would be transferred to the Veteran Reserve Corps in 1864. When he was discharged

after the war he would return home to Huntington. On September 4, 1866 he married Miss Elizabeth A. Drew. Elizabeth was the girl next door. After the war he lived in, and perhaps built or helped to build, the lovely Victorian home across the street from his parents on Soundview Road. Both homes

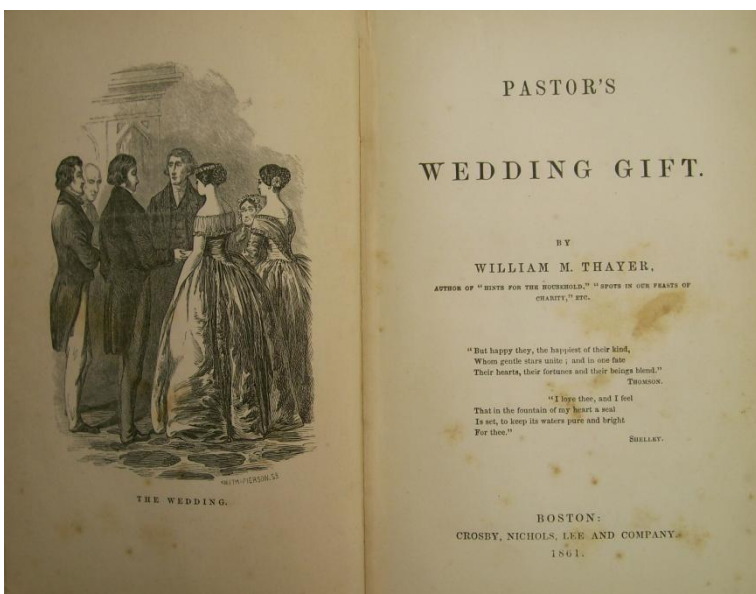


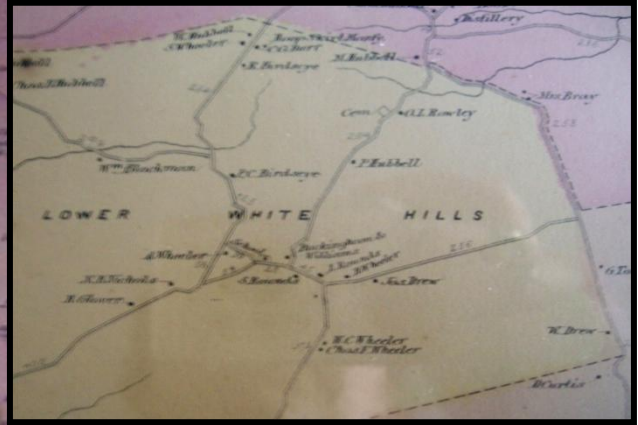
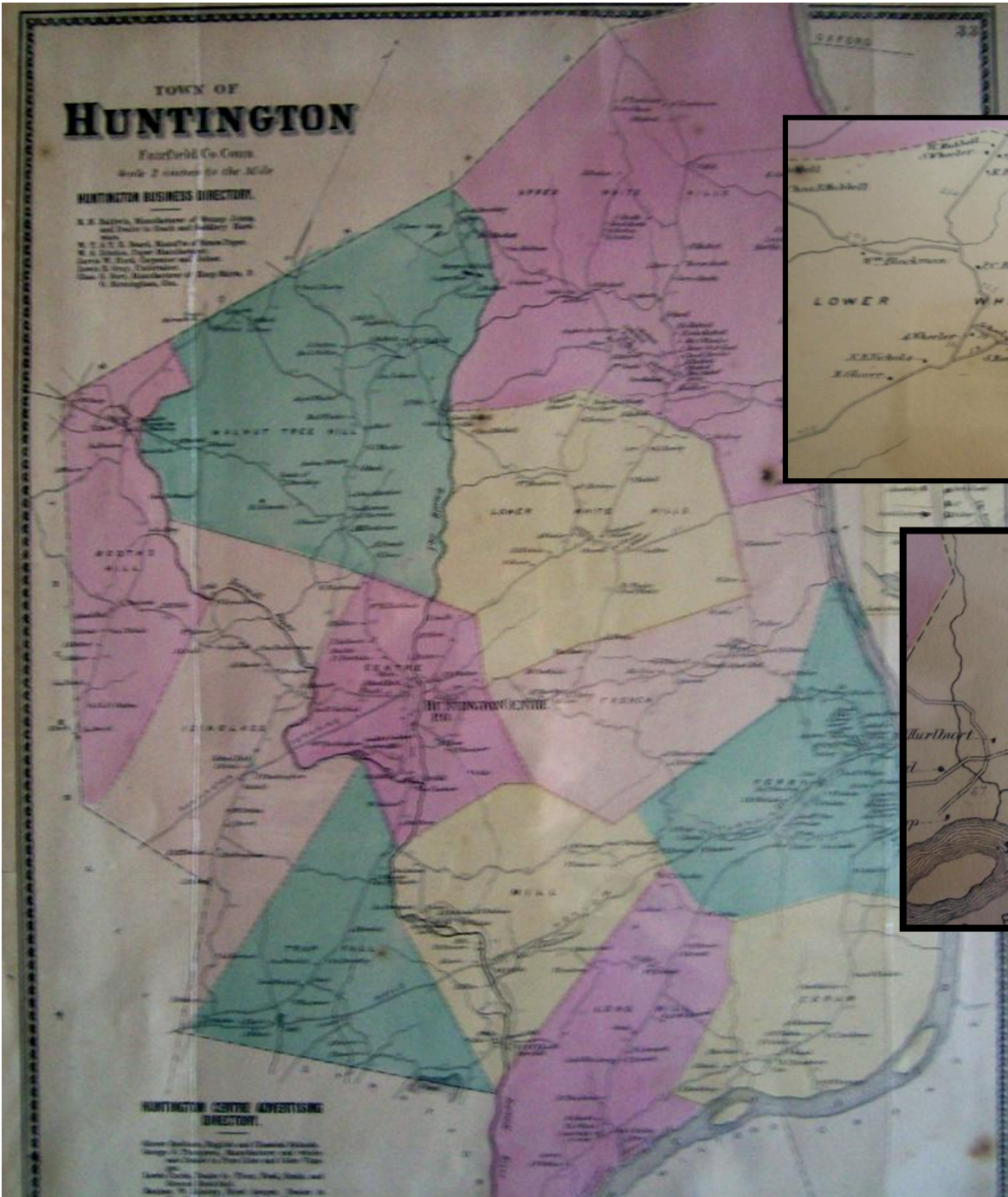
are still located as depicted on the 1867 Beers map of Huntington. Upon enlistment, Sylvester would give his profession as carpenter. In 1875 he would file for and receive an invalid's pension from the Federal government. In that document he would still be listed as a carpenter and builder with the disclaimer, "as far as practicable" presumably due to his wounds.

There is no physical description of him in the pension documents. At the end of his life he would move to Mary Street in Shelton. He would subsequently become a bookkeeper for Sawyer Feed and ultimately a Vice President for the Ansonia Flour & Grain Co. He was a founder and charter member of the First Baptist Church of Shelton. He and Selah Blakeman would be active in the civic affairs of Huntington, and later Shelton as it was renamed, as members of the Kellogg GAR Post and IOOF (the Odd Fellows).

Sylvester Rounds would pass away February 18, 1899 at age 56 two weeks after being thrown from a sleigh. His obituary notes that he was suffering from typhoid at that time. Elizabeth would apply for a widow's pension that year.

This book was a gift from their pastor to Sylvester Rounds and his wife Elizabeth on the day they were married. Their certificate of marriage was filled out inside the book. *Courtesy of Donald and Shirley McEwen of Shelton, CT*





Insert third inset of Ford's Flat similar to the two detail maps above

The 1867 Beers map of Huntington with and inset detail of the Lower White Hills and the properties of Sylvester and his father Levi Rounds. The second inset shows Selah Blakeman's property purchased after the war. Selah would settle alongside the Wakelee in-laws. Corum and the Oronoke section of Stratford are contiguous to each other along the River. Ford's Flat, where the Crofuts earned money from shad fishing, is visible on the map south of Corum along the river just above Oronoke in Stratford.

Selah G. Blakeman

Farmer, Oronoke, Stratford & Corum, Huntington Connecticut

Born May 23, 1841

Died December 18, 1924



Left: Selah G. Blakeman before his enlistment (*courtesy of Ann Wardman*) and posing proudly in this sergeant's stripes in 1864 after his promotion (*courtesy of Stratford Historical Society*)

At the end of his long life in 1924 Selah G. Blakeman would be mourned as Shelton's Grand Old Man. He would outlive all of his friends and many of his family. One of ten children of Gould and Harriet Birdseye Blakeman, he would enlist in the summer of 1862. In July 1862 he joined the 17th Connecticut in along with Stephen and Henry. He must have been somewhat of an iron soldier because he is reported to have made every march and roll of the regiment. He would be the only one of his friends left standing on July 1, 1863 on Barlow's Knoll at Gettysburg where Stephen would be killed instantly and Henry and Sylvester

would both be terribly wounded and then captured. Selah would retreat with the survivors of his regiment in good order to the foot of Cemetery Hill along the Brickyard Lane. He would fight hard the next day with his regiment at the foot of Cemetery Hill and would survive the battle unscathed, the only one of the four friends to do so. The pictures above show him before the war and posing proudly in his sergeants stripes. On January 30, 1864 he was promoted to Sergeant and put in charge of various pioneering (construction) operations for the regiment. From Hilton Head before their discharge, J. Henry wrote home on July 11, to his future wife Amelia Burr, "...Selah has been offered a commission if he will stay, by Col. Beard of the 22nd U.S.C.T. But he thinks he has been in the army long enough and will probably not accept the proposed honor." Selah came home with his regiment. Like Henry and Sylvester, he returned home in 1866 to marry his sweetheart, Cordelia A. Wakelee. He purchased property to farm in the Corum section of Huntington by her brother Gideon Wakelee and his father-in-law, Ebenezer Wakelee in 1866. The Blakeman and the Wakelee families were connected by land and blood and Selah's marriage to Cordelia would strengthen those bonds. The couple would never have children. It would be Selah's niece Harriet, the daughter of his brother Carolos and the name sake of his mother, who would assist Selah in managing veteran's affairs and the reunions. Ultimately in her capacity as the treasurer of the 17th Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Association, long after the last survivor had passed, she would close the organization by sending a check for \$908.06 to the Gettysburg Battlefield Preservation Association. She was determined that her uncle and the other citizen soldiers of the 17th Connecticut be remembered for their sacrifices at a small Pennsylvania hamlet in 1863 where their courage would save the nation. Selah was civic minded and involved in community and veteran's affairs his whole life long. He would outlive all of the others. He would have many accomplishments of which to be proud, but his proudest moments were a few minutes on a hill where he stood with his friends after a long forced march, on a hot day in July 1863 at a place called Gettysburg.