

Greene County historian Kent Fonner documents the pockets of resistance to the Civil War within the county as the conflict unfolded. *Intimidating the Disaffected: Resisting Rebels, Deserters, and Copperheads in Greene County, PA, 1861-1865*, published in 2022, is his well-researched account of grass roots antipathy to the war effort; and how the authorities attempted to quell it. The excerpts below—from pages 82-83, 86, 91-95 and reprinted with permission of the author—give a taste of the disquiet on the home front, as well as a summary of Black life in the wake of the rebellion. The book includes Appendices of drafted men from Greene County, and is available at [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

Knights of the Golden Circle

Rumors circulated throughout Greene County about the activities of a secret organization of Southern sympathizers known as the Knights of the Golden Circle. The Knights' origin can be traced to the filibustering days before the war in the 1850s when various independent private expeditions were made to seize control of some islands and territories in the Caribbean Sea, ostensibly to allow room for the spread of the Southern plantation system and Black slavery. One of the most famous of these filibustering expeditions was led by William Walker in 1855 to seize Nicaragua. The Knights formed in 1854 to support such actions, the "Golden Circle" referring to the Caribbean and its territories. After the eruption of the Civil War, some of these societies appeared in western states. It was believed that no such groups existed in Pennsylvania, but there is evidence to support the opposite view in Greene County.

One county historian describes the formation of a Knights of the Golden Circle society in Perry Township. He notes the men organized as a paramilitary force and even collected arms to be used in some action to support the southern cause. There exists a survey of the old Mount Tabor Church grounds and cemetery in Gilmore Township, located on an isolated country road near the post-war village of Hero, a short distance from Jollytown. The surveyor, Edwin G. Smith, in his 1934 survey plat, records that the church grounds were used as a meeting place for the Knights of the Golden Circle. At a Democrat Party meeting in Perry Township on 23 April 1864, Reverend Thomas Rose gave an hour-long speech calling for support of the Constitution and the law, but "warned" his hearers "to beware of the heel of oppression that was designing to grind" them "to atoms, and begged" them "to have the manly courage and independence of" their "revolutionary sires." Reverend Rose was a Baptist preacher who also gave an occasional "stump speech" as he preached "the word of God amidst his abolition surroundings." After his election to the Pennsylvania state legislature, it was alleged that Reverend Rose was such a notorious Copperhead that the West Virginia government authorities had ordered his arrest if he came into the state and that he had been a leader of the disloyal Knights. **[The antagonism between Southern sympathizers and Unionists supportive of the War effort had reached a head in the run up to the Presidential election of 1864. —ed.]** Andrew J. Waychoff summed up the situation in his *Local History of Greene County and Southwestern Pennsylvania*:

"The United States government having learned [of the Knights of the Golden Circle in Mount Morris and their plans] sent a company of soldiers who camped in and about the courthouse in Waynesburg for a few days. They quietly marched down to Mount Morris, where they encamped for one night. That was the last ever heard of the Knights of the Golden Circle."

The War's Aftermath

By the close of the war in 1865, it was as if a fever that had swept Greene County ran its course. Newspapers stopped carrying stories of Copperheads, political violence, soldiers guarding election polls or patrolling back country roads delivering military draft notices and searching for army deserters or draft evaders. War news faded out of sight from the columns of the *Waynesburg Messenger* and the *Greene County Republican*. Before Captain Randlett's soldiers of Company F, 16th Veteran Reserve Corps, left Waynesburg in December 1864, the Captain published a "Card" in the *Waynesburg Messenger*:

"In behalf of the Company, I take the opportunity to express our thanks to the Ladies and citizens of Waynesburg, for the many favors received from them. During our stay in Waynesburg we have been treated with unmarked kindness, relieving us of that yearning for home which long absence engenders, and making a home for us in your midst. We cannot expect to remain long with you, but when we leave it will be with regret, and the citizens of Waynesburg will be always kindly remembered by the members of Company 'F', 16th Regiment, V.R.C."

Even the Democrats in the county admitted that the soldiers sent in their midst were, after all, gentlemen. Sometimes a scar left by the war would be picked at to remind voters that a few county politicians could not be trusted based on their record during the conflict. One correspondent to the *Republican*, for example, reminded its readers that Thomas Rose, Greene County's representative in the State House in Harrisburg, had supported measures to keep soldiers in the field from voting and that he had been a notorious Copperhead and a leader of the Knights of the Golden Circle. For the most part, however, people wanted to place it all behind them and get on with just living.

Black soldiers came home to Greene County and found leadership roles in their community. By becoming trustees and stewards in the AME Church in Waynesburg, they continued the fight for acceptance and integration in American society at large. Pennsylvania denied them the right to vote until 1873, but through the church these men found a place to express their collective voice for equality and justice.

The AME Church moved from Morris Street to a new building on West Franklin Street in Waynesburg which the congregation built and dedicated on 21 August 1887. In the summer of 1892, on June 1, the Church held a Civil Rights Meeting, protesting "The Outrages" taking place against Blacks in the South. The meeting heard a speech by Reverend C.A. McGee, who served as chairman for the meeting. Then a series of resolutions of protest were adopted as drafted by a committee, composed of John Stewart, D.O. Ferrel, S.J. Suttles, William T. Baker, and C.S. Hickey. Later that summer, on August 30th, the AME Church sponsored a mass meeting at the Fairgrounds in Waynesburg "to present the civil and political rights and conditions of the colored people." A procession from the AME Church paraded to the Fairgrounds, and the meeting lasted the whole day, attended by both Blacks and Whites from the area, including State Senator D.S. Walton, who chaired the event.

The church remained active well into the twentieth century. In July 1895, the annual camp meeting was held in a grove owned by C.C. Harry near Lippincott that ran over two Sabbaths. In 1911 and 1912, the congregation made improvements to the Franklin Street church building, including the construction of a bell tower, art glass windows, and interior alterations that all cost about \$1,500. At that time, the church was being pastored by Reverend J.S. Smith. During the fiftieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1913, a committee was organized to plan participation at the celebration in Philadelphia

that September. During World War I, when two Blacks from Waynesburg, Homer Jackson and William Turner, were sent off to the army, the AME Church gave them each New Testaments and comfort kits, honored them at a reception at the church, and accompanied them to the train station, along with "Sellers' Band," that Saturday morning for the 6:25 A.M. train. The church celebrated its hundredth anniversary the week of 18 September 1932, while the Reverend G.B. Duff was pastor.

The last Black veteran of the Civil War residing in Greene County died in Waynesburg on 16 October 1927. Oliver Perry McGruder was born in Marshall, Virginia, to slave parents, Stanton and Mary Jane McGruder, about 1845. He worked as a farm laborer and moved to Waynesburg in the 1890s. As a young man of 19, he enlisted on 5 October 1864 at New Brighton, Pennsylvania, to serve in Company H, 41st U.S.C.T., as a substitute for a drafted man named John Barger. Barger paid McGruder \$500 to serve as his substitute in the draft. He enlisted to serve for one year and was initially assigned to duty at Camp William Penn near Philadelphia for training and assignment to his regiment. He became sick during his stay at William Penn, and spent at least two weeks in the hospital there. He was present for duty January through April and most of May, 1865; but on 20 May 1865 he was again placed in the hospital and given a discharge for disability at Fortress Monroe, Virginia on 14 June 1865. At the time of his death, he was living in the North Ward of Waynesburg. His funeral service was held at the AME Church on Franklin Street, and he is interred at Green Mount Cemetery.

As to other veterans from Greene County, it is apparent that almost as soon as the war ended, the men felt a need to organize to ensure that each one of them and their families were properly cared for by the community. As early as 12 August 1865, veterans and representatives of deceased veterans met at the Greene County Court House to organize a soldiers' union. They sought equalization of bounties paid volunteers who joined early in the war before larger bounties were funded by the state and federal governments. They wanted widows' pensions and some financial pensions for men who suffered wounds or debilitating illnesses caused by their military service. Eventually, similar movements across the country led to the creation of national veterans organizations. The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) was first formed with Post No. 1 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1866. An organization restricted to Union officers, the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (MOLLUS) was established in 1865. Before the end of the century, Greene County had seven GAR posts organized as District No. 46 of the Pennsylvania Department of the National GAR. These included the Alfred Sibley Post No. 119 in Greensboro, the Cumberland Post No. 265 in Carmichaels, the J.F. McCullough Post No. 367 in Waynesburg, the William Smith Post No. 428 in Wind Ridge, the Jesse Taylor Post No. 450 in Mount Morris, the Phillip Gump Post No. 550 in Deep Valley and Jollytown, and the Captain William Lindsey Post No. 603 in Jefferson.