

'round the square

HONOREE: The villages of Portville, across the state line in New York, and Gettysburg, in southwest Pennsylvania, will be linked together forever at 11 a.m. on Saturday, July 3, when the two communities pay tribute to Sgt. Amos Humiston of Portville.

He was mortally wounded when his regiment, the 154th New York Volunteers, part of the 11th Corps, was retreating through Gettysburg northward on the afternoon of July 1, 1863. The moving appearance of the unidentified body of this brave young sergeant — glazed eyes affixed on an ambrotype of his three little children — drew immediate sympathy from local citizens and a volunteer surgeon from Philadelphia.

The surgeon, Dr. J. Francis Bourns, advertised copies of the ambrotype in an effort to locate the soldier's family.

Four months later, Amos' wife Philinda saw the ad and confirmed his identity. Sympathy for the family prompted the citizens to render assistance to the bereft widow and children. This effort soon led to the idea of helping victims of the war on a larger scale.

Soon after the war, an orphanage was established at Gettysburg. It became not only the home of Humiston's family for a time but it also sheltered many needy children who had lost their fathers in the Civil War.

A boulder monument with bronze plaque depicting the likenesses of Humiston and his children will be erected in his honor for the legacy he left. The Gettysburg Volunteer Fire Co. has consented to placement of the monument on its grounds on Stratton Street near where Humiston fell 130 years ago.

The sergeant was born in Oswego, N.Y., on Lake Ontario, in 1830. He was a harness maker by trade. Amos married Philinda Betsey (Ensworth) Smith on July 4, 1854, in Tioga County, N.Y. Their son Franklin and daughter Alice were born there. Later, the Humistons moved to Portville, where Frederick was born.

The sergeant's minister described him as a "man of noble, generous impulses, a quiet citizen, a kind neighbor and devotedly attached to his family." Amos' captain testified to his good qualities as a soldier.

In the beginning of the Civil War, Humiston wanted to enlist but believed his first duty was to his family. After the Peninsula Campaign, however, when President Lincoln called for 300,000 more volunteers, Amos enlisted on the promise of relatives and neighbors that his family would be cared for.

Since the summer of 1991, Gettysburg and Portville have been working closely together to make July 3, 1993, a memorable and meaningful occasion. One hundred thirty years after the Battle of Gettysburg, Amos Humiston and his regiment will be commemorated for the unique roles they played in the Civil War.

Besides the monument, the sergeant from Portville will be remembered by a book titled, "A Soldier's Legacy — the National Homestead at Gettysburg — 1866-1876." The book was co-authored by Cindy Stouffer and Mary Ruth Collins. The volume will be available the week of June 28.