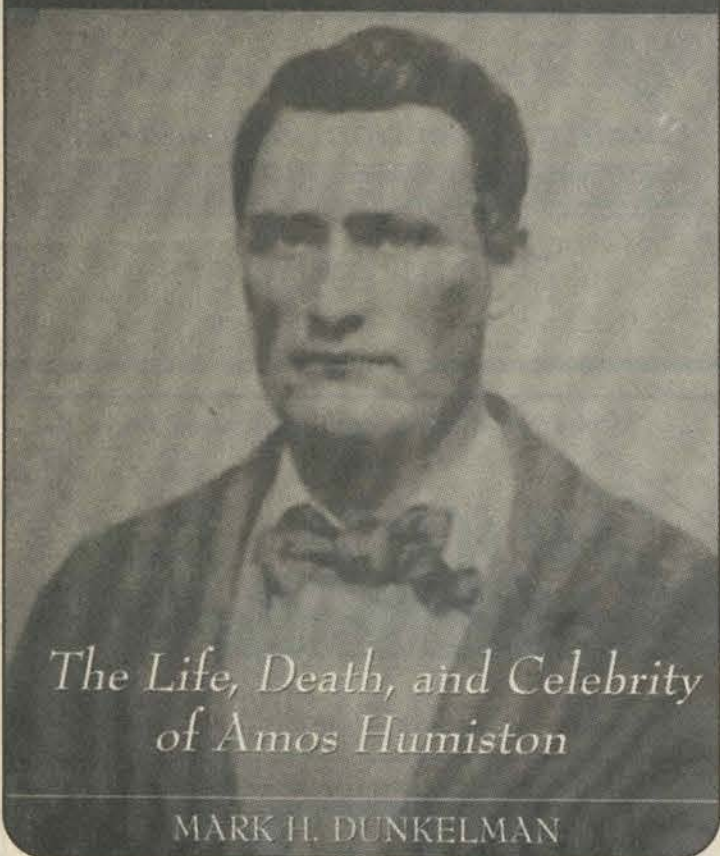


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Life Time

Gettysburg's Unknown Soldier



Legacy of Portville soldier lives on



Above, author Mark Dunkleman discusses his latest book focusing on the life of Portville's Civil War soldiers Sgt. Amos Humiston. His book is seen in the photo at the left. Inset, an image of Sgt. Humiston's children, Frank, Fred and Alice.

Descendants of 154th Civil War regiment gather last weekend to honor famed Portville soldier and family

By TRACY RIORDAN
□The Times Herald

Nearly 500,000 people were killed in the United States' Civil War. Each death — Union or Confederate — touched someone's family, devastated someone's life.

But it was one death specifically, a Portville husband and father, that touched the entire North.

Sgt. Amos Humiston of Portville, part of the 154th New York Volunteer Infantry, was killed on the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg on July 1, 1863. He was one of many area men who served and were ultimately killed during the war. What made his story poignant, however, was his anonymity after death.

His body, bearing no accurate identification, was found on July 5, by a young woman. The only identifying characteristic was the ambrotype (a glass negative backed by dark paper) he was clutching of his three children, Frank, Fred and Alice, which his last look was fixed on.

The young girl gave the ambrotype to her father, a barkeep in nearby Graeffenberg, Pa., where it was displayed behind his bar and its story was shared with the patrons, until it was taken back to Gettysburg by a

Dr. Francis Bourns who vowed to find the soldier's family.

The story subsequently spread and became famous around the North thanks to the interest of several newspapers. Word of the unknown soldier and the image he held to his death eventually reached Philinda Humiston, the sergeant's widow, in Portville.

In his book, "Gettysburg's Unknown Soldier: The Life, Death and Celebrity of Amos Humiston," 154th Regiment author Mark Dunkelman of Providence, R.I. outlines the story tale that "made headlines in newspapers across the North and captured the imagina-

tion of millions," he wrote.

Over the years this story of a father's dying thoughts has been told and retold.

On the book's jacket it is described by another Civil War author as one of the "great human interest stories of Gettysburg." His death even stands as the inspiration of the establishment of a home for children of deceased soldiers.

Mr. Dunkelman, himself the great-grandson of a 154th Regiment soldier, takes the story one step further in his book, however, by delving into the life of Sgt. Humiston, not only his death.

From his years of research, which included tracking down descendants of Sgt.

Humiston and other soldiers of the 154th Regiment, he pieces together the entire story, from birth to death and beyond.

A number of Cattaraugus County people also helped with the book's research. They include county historian Kenneth Kysor; Lorna Spencer, curator of the county's Memorial and Historical Museum in Little Valley; Ronda Pollock, president of the Portville Historical and Preservation Society, and her husband Thomas.

Through his year's research for this book and his first "The Hardtack Regiment," written with Michael Winey, Mr. Dunkelman formed relationships that led him to organize an annual reunion of the regiment's descendants. Saturday that gathering was held at the Portville Presbyterian Church, the site of the Great Union Meeting of Jan. 3, 1864.

Over 100 people, including 55 descendants, packed the church Saturday to watch the recreation of the 1864 meeting during which Dr. Bourns and others addressed the congregation regarding Sgt. Humiston's story.

"I am very excited to be replicating this meeting on the same site it took place," Mr. Dunkelman said Saturday afternoon. "It is a great tribute to the Humiston story."



Facts about Amos Humiston ...

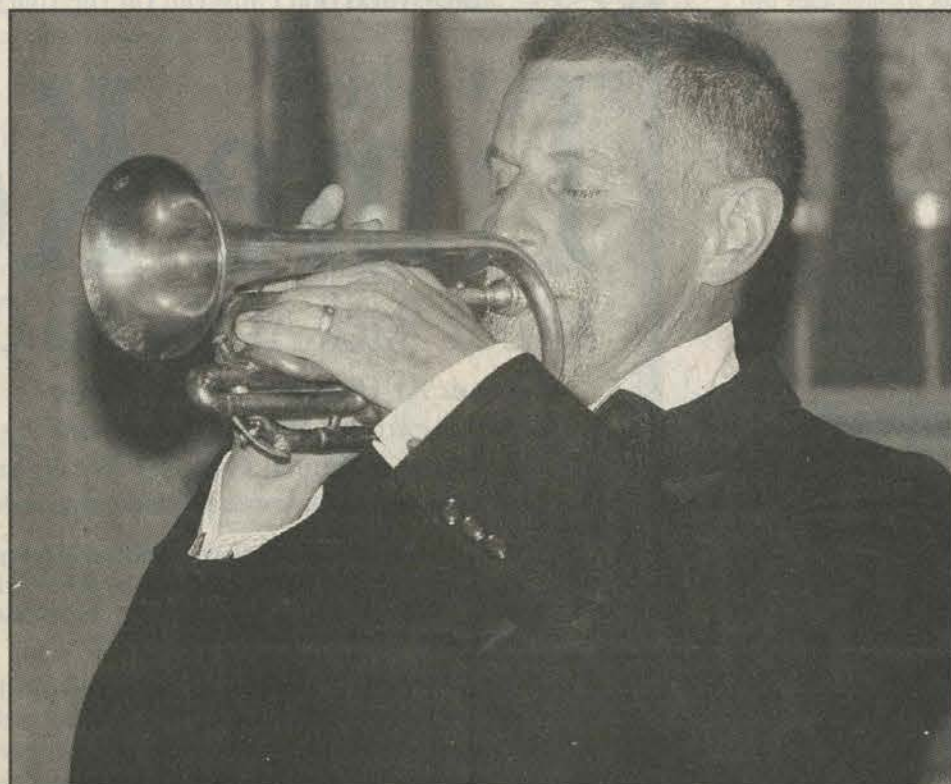
■ Amos Humiston, one of four children, was born April 26, 1830, in Owego, N.Y. to Ambrose and Mary Humiston;

■ he and Philinda Ensworth Smith were married on July 4, 1854. They had three children — Frank, Alice and Frederick;

■ Sgt. Humiston enlisted as a corporal into Company C in on July 26, 1862, at Portville to serve three years. He was promoted to sergeant on Jan. 25, 1863, and was killed on the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg, July 1, 1863;

■ a monument to Sgt. Humiston and his family was erected in Gettysburg and dedicated on July 3, 1993, adding to the over 1,200 monuments on the streets and fields of the city.

(Facts taken from "Gettysburg's Unknown Soldier: The Life, Death and Celebrity of Amos Humiston.")



"His children's ambrotype was the single, sad clue as to the identity of this soldier."

Mark Dunkelman
author of
"Gettysburg's Unknown Soldier: The Life, Death and Celebrity of Amos Humiston."

Robert Fairbanks of Portville plays "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," during the 14th annual reunion of the descendants of the 154th Civil War regiment at the Portville Presbyterian Church Saturday.

photos by TARA LaFREDO
Times Herald