

THE SOLDIERS' ORPHANS' HOME
GETTYSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA.

A few days after the Battle of Gettysburg the body of a Union soldier was found in a vacant lot near the property of Associate Judge S. R. Russell at the corner of what is now North Stratton and York Streets. It had been discovered by Peter Beitler.

Tightly clutched in the hand of the deceased soldier was an ambrotype likeness of three small children, mute testimony that the soldier's last thoughts, ere his soul departed to his God, were of those three youngsters.

With appropriate services the body was buried on Judge Russell's property.

The incident awakened the tenderest sympathies of Dr. J. Francis Bourns, of Philadelphia, a man of means and one extremely interested in the men in service and their families. He borrowed the picture and had thousands of copies struck off and widely circulated, determined to identify the soldier and the three children.

In his faithful quest and after some anxious months of seeking information of the deceased soldier, Dr. Bourns' circulars reached Cattaraugus County, New York, where little trouble was encountered in identifying the soldier and his three children.

The soldier was definitely identified as Amos Humiston, Orderly Sergeant in Company "C", 154th Regiment of New York Volunteers. He had been killed in the retreat of the 11th Corps through Gettysburg on the afternoon of July 1, 1863.

Sergeant Humiston's body was disinterred by David Wills and given a full military burial in the Soldiers' National Cemetery, a tribute fittingly deserving one who gave his life for his country.

Discovery of the identity of the deceased soldier and the three children, Frank, Frederick and Alice Humiston, led to a nation-wide interest in the future of children orphaned by the great conflict.

It also resulted in the establishment of the Soldiers' Orphans' Home at Gettysburg, an institution of private maintenance, in what is now the Harry E. Koch residence, Baltimore Street, opposite the Cyclorama.

Pressed by Dr. Bourns and others the National Orphans' Homestead Association came into being and was incorporated March 22, 1867, "for the purpose of establishing and sustaining a National Institution such as shall meet, as far as possible, the pressing demand of these suppliants for our fostering care." Gettysburg incorporators included David McCaughy, Edward McPherson and R. G. McCreary.

Rev. Dr. Matthew Simpson, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, was elected president. Eight vice presidents were elected as follows: Dr. Charles P. Mollvaine, Ohio; Dr. Alfred Lee, Delaware; Dr. Robert J. Breckinridge, Kentucky; Dr. George Duffield, Michigan; Major General George G. Meade, U. S. Army; Ex-Governor Sprague, Rhode Island; Ex-Governor Bradford, Maryland; and John G. Mersereau, New York. Rev. Dr. Richard Newton of Philadelphia, was elected Chairman of the Executive Committee and Peter B. Simons, of Philadelphia, Treasurer. Dr. Bourns was general secretary and A. Martin, of Philadelphia, was recording secretary. Rev. Thomas Atkinson was the soliciting agent.

The method of financing the institution was unique. Sabbath Schools were appealed to. Those donating \$25 became shareholders and were permitted to elect a soldier's orphan, or any other one youngster, for admittance to the school. The orphans were to be properly cared for until they reached an age when they could take care of themselves. Liberal contributions were also received from individuals. Donors of \$100 became honorary life directors of the school. \$50 made a contributor a life member of the association.

By April, 1866, steps had progressed so far that Sabbath Schools donating toward the establishment of the Orphans' School had voted, almost unanimously, to locate the school in historic Gettysburg.

There were special committee sessions and town meetings held in Gettysburg to lend support to the movement. Rev. Dr. H. L. Baugher, Dr. Charles Horner, R. G. McCreary, Esq., Rev. D. T. Carnahan, Prof. F. A. Muhlenberg, David McConaughy, Esq., J. L. Schick, Charles J. Tyson and other prominent Gettysburgians interested themselves in the movement.

A special committee from the Association finally selected the property formerly owned by Captain John Myers, adjoining the National Cemetery, as the site for the school. This building still stands and is located just north of the National Cemetery.

On May 15, 1866, at the request of the National Association, Gettysburgians elected a board of 26 members to "assist in the work of establishing and managing the Orphans' Homestead", consisting of the following:

Prof. F. A. Muhlenberg, Rev. D. T. Carnahan, A. D. Buehler, Esq., Rev. Dr. Charles A. Hay, J. L. Schick, H. J. Fahnestock, D. McConaughy, Esq., John Winebrenner, Chas. J. Tyson, Wm. C. Stallsmith, Emanuel Bushman, John A. Rupp, R. G. McCreary, Esq.

Mrs. C. P. Krauth, Mrs. Robert Horner, Mrs. D. A. Buehler, Mrs. H. L. Baugher, Mrs. John S. Crawford, Mrs. David Wills, Mrs. John Culp, Mrs. E. S. Breidenbaugh, Mrs. R. G. Harper, Mrs. W. A. Duncan, Mrs. Sarah Monfort, Miss Annie Danner, and Miss Margaret Doersom.

Late in October, 1866, twenty-two orphans arrived in Gettysburg from Philadelphia, the first contingent to take up residence in the school. There were twelve boys and ten girls. Formal opening of the school was first set for November 13, 1866 but later changed to November 20, 1866.

Early contributions lent encouragement to the originators of the school. While all contributions can not be identified, public acknowledgments were made from time to time. For instance, July 24, 1866, donations totaling \$1,589.46 were acknowledged from seven sources.

On November 20, 1866, the soldiers' Orphans' Home was formally opened. There was a procession from the Square to the school comprising court house officials, clergymen, professors and students from the College, Seminary and Sabbath Schools and citizens and visitors. The Gettysburg Brass Band "had the right of procession and discoursed excellent music."

Captains Earnshaw and Hunter and Sergeants Duphorn and McKensie were marshals.

The three Humiston children were said to have been students at the school.

Prominent out-of-town clergymen and Gettysburg ministers participated in the official exercises. Services were conducted in the school yard in the afternoon and in the College Church in the evening. Sabbath School children sang the National Anthem and "America" and a select choir gave an ode written by Mrs. Isabella James, of Philadelphia. Thirty orphaned boys and girls were present.

The first Christmas at the school was a memorable one for the orphans. Ladies of Gettysburg prepared and served a Christmas turkey dinner to the children and otherwise provided entertainment during the day.

In January of the following year 35 orphans were enrolled and new contributions totaled \$1,947.28, more than one thousand dollars of which came from donors residing in Michigan.

In February, 1868, when the Orphans marked the anniversary of the birth of George Washington, there were 60 youngsters enrolled and another appeal was made for funds to provide shelter for 500 orphans at Gettysburg.

In April, 1870, a petition was presented to Congress asking for an appropriation of \$75,000 in government bonds "in aid of the extension of the buildings and enlargement of the operations" of the school. However, this failed to pass. In 1872, another petition asked Congress to appropriate \$50,000 "for the education of soldiers' orphans" at Gettysburg. This failed, also, to pass.

In the same year Dr. Bourns, in a prepared statement, reported expenses of \$8,889.82. Receipts totaled \$6,239.47. It was announced that the school's agents had donations of \$1,000 pledged for the year. By 1876, the school was encountering financial difficulties.

Donations and contributions gradually dwindled. Enrollment fell off because of a lack of finance and there were intimations that unless additional funds were received the school would have to be closed. Congress refused to make an appropriation for the school.

In December, 1877, the school was without students except for a little girl who was immediately adopted by N. G. Wilson, Superintendent of the National Cemetery.

In February, 1878, the Orphans's Home furnishings were sold at public sale by Sheriff Spangler, and the Homestead was sold to Isaac Herster, Henry J. Fahnestock and George B. Stover for \$3,100.

The frame building that adjoined the brick school house has since been moved to the front of the lot.