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FEATURED

State & Union: Medal of Honor winner from Allegany

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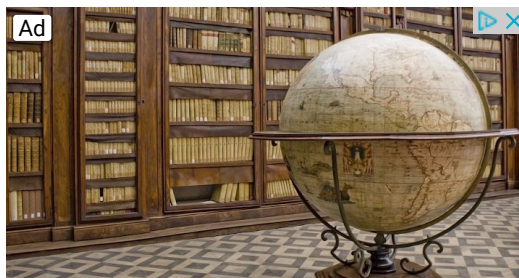
Stephen Welch
photo submitted

Last weekend we wrote about David L. Smith, a Civil War veteran and Medal of Honor winner who lived out his years after the war in Olean. This past week Francie Potter, president of the Allegany Area Historical Association, sent us information on another Medal of Honor winner in the Civil War: Stephen Welch of Allegany.

Welch was born March 31, 1824, in Groton, N.Y., and moved along with his parents to Allegany in about 1850. He was married to Louise Harriett Allen and the couple had four sons and two daughters.

In the summer of 1862, Welch enlisted in Co. C of the 154th New York Volunteers — known as the “Hardtack Regiment” — which served and saw action for the remainder of the war. On May 9, 1864, at the commencement of Gen. William T. Sherman’s March to the Sea in Georgia, Welch’s unit was ordered to take a

Rebel position on Rocky Face Ridge, near Dalton, Ga.



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“A few of my company were detailed to act as skirmishers,” Welch, a sergeant at this point in the war, said in a chronicling of the action in which he was awarded the MOH. The brigade halted under heavy fire from Confederates behind a palisade at the top of the ridge, and had to withdraw and reform.

“About this time the major came along and told me he had seen a wounded soldier of my company between the lines, adding that I had better get someone to help me go up and get him. Taking a tent-mate, Sgt. Charles W. McKay (of Mansfield), we started out under a heavy fire, not only from the enemy but also from our own lines.

“We found George Greek, a corporal of the color guard, badly wounded in both legs. The poor fellow had been trying to drag himself along with both hands and had sunk down in exhaustion. McKay revived him with a drink from his canteen, after which the corporal, raising himself on his elbows, asked if the colors were safe. We assured him that they were, and he dropped down again, satisfied and happy.

“We rolled him on a blanket, picked him up, and with bullets whizzing about us, managed to get him off the field.”

McKay also earned the Medal of Honor for the rescue.

Welch, who rose to captain by the end of the war, served under his father as deputy sheriff of Cattaraugus County from 1865-67. After his death on March 31, 1906, at the age of 82, his obituary in the Allegany Citizen noted that he was a pioneer lumberman, soldier, farmer, surveyor and “valued fellow citizen.”

His funeral, the paper noted, was well attended, with the Rev. F.A. Johnson of the Methodist Episcopal church officiating.

“Mr. Johnson took no particular text for his sermon,” the obituary read, “but contended that while the deceased professed no particular religion, his long and honorable career denoted that he put up a good and vigorous fight in the battle of life.”



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