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## Onondaga Historical Association brings local Civil War soldiers to life through daily tweets

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**Dick Case / Post-Standard columnist**  
By



Ryan MacCammon/The Post-Standard

Barbara Rawlings, an employee at the Onondaga Historical Association in Syracuse, transcribes entries from a Civil War journal to be put on the organization's Twitter page. ([twitter.com/OnondagaHisAssn](https://twitter.com/OnondagaHisAssn)) Today is the 150th anniversary of the Civil War.

The Onondaga Historical Association has come up with a new and unusual way of teaching the history of the American Civil War.

By Twitter.

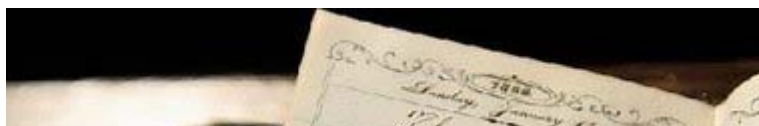
Gregg Tripoli, executive director of the Syracuse association, said the OHA will launch its Twitter Project today, the 150th anniversary of the start of the war. It will follow the lives of six local men who were soldiers in Union armies, continuing for five years.

The war began April 12, 1861 when Confederate batteries fired on Ft. Sumter, in Charleston, S.C. harbor.

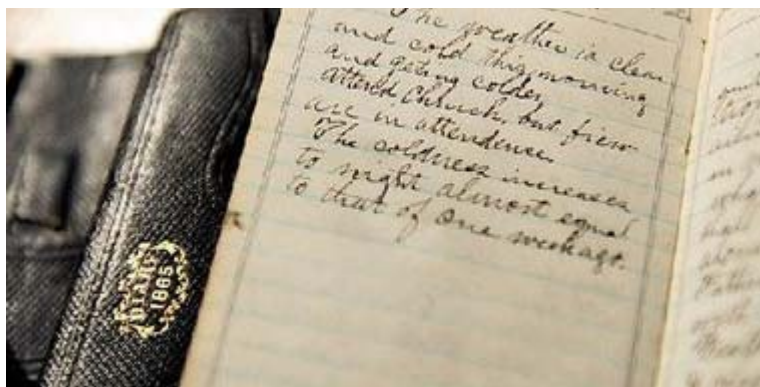
"In Their Own Words: Personal Perspectives of the Civil War," will present daily Twitter entries of selected items from their own diaries and letters in the association's collections.

The six are James and John Phillips, Herbert Wells, Alonzo Clapp, David Nelson and Augustus Dwight, Gregg Tripoli explained. "They will recount their experiences and eyewitness accounts of the most devastating war in America's history," he said.

"Twitter followers will come to know and appreciate these courageous local men and experience the heroism, heartache, loves, losses, triumphs and tragedies that were experienced by them exactly 150 years to the day after they happened," according to Gregg. "Followers will see how the beautifully eloquent language of the Victorian era creates a poetically ironic twist to the raw, and at times, horrific scenes they describe."



The historical group's website is [twitter.com/OnondagaHisAssn](https://twitter.com/OnondagaHisAssn).



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Ryan MacCammon/The Post-Standard

A soldier's Civil War journal entry from Sunday, Jan. 14, 1866 from the collection at the Onondaga Historical Association in Syracuse. Today is 150th anniversary of the start of the Civil War. /span>

The historians did not share whether the men survived the war or no.

Matthew MacVittie, OHA associate curator of history, is in charge of the project. One of the members of the team is an intern, Molly Sowers, who was hired to transcribe diaries from the original, hand-written, documents onto the computer. She had been creating logs of the association's collection of glass negatives.

First off, Molly has been transcribing the journals of

David Nelson, a schoolteacher and farmer from Bennett's Corners, a hamlet near Oneida in Madison County. Nelson enlisted in Company A of the 117th New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment, primarily recruited from the city of Rome.

She said Nelson was "quite a spiritual fellow," yet down-to-earth. The project has been "quite a love" for her, Molly explained.

Gregg Tripoli said Nelson's journal entries will be introduced later in the project. Early on, "to set the stage" for what follows, he said background on the war will be introduced along with newspaper accounts and other general information.

James Phillips and John, his younger brother, were from Manlius, the sons of a tailor, Hiram Phillips. James listed his occupation as painter. James enlisted April 1861; John in 1864. James was a substitute for John Hudson, who paid him \$700 to enlist in his stead.

Gregg said the brothers had several relatives who also served in Union forces. They often wrote of their encounters.

Augustus Dwight was a Syracusan and a lawyer. He organized the 122nd regiment of New York volunteers, also known as the Third Onondaga Regiment.

Alonzo Clapp was a schoolteacher who grew up on the north shore of Oneida Lake. He was mustered in as a lieutenant in the Third Onondaga.

Herbert Wells was a millwright working in Baldwinsville. He was commissioned a second lieutenant in August of 1862.

The first series of tweets will consist of newspaper stories and excerpts from letters that follow the activities and movements of the First Onondaga Regiment. Then the brothers Phillips will be introduced.

Here's an example of the tweets: "In the morning papers an account of the assassination of the President in

Washington. It hardly seems as though it could be so, but at the same time it is also possible. All are feeling sober over the announcement...."

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