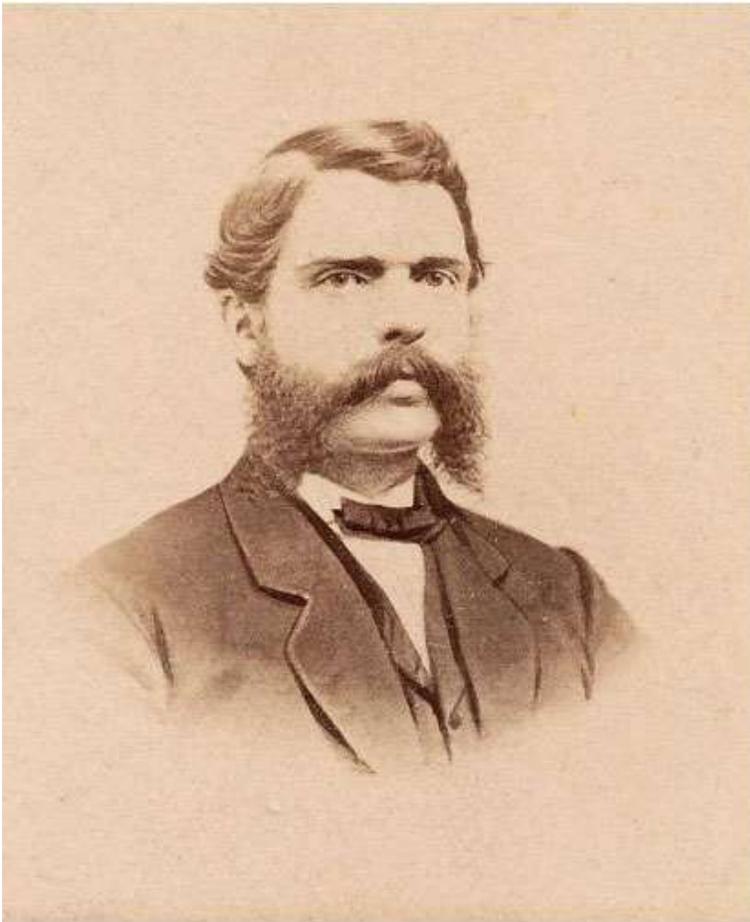


MANSFIELD MEMORIES: 'Godspeed and a Safe Return:' The Life of S. Crocker Lovell

By Kevin McNatt and Andrew Todesco

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MANSFIELD - Samuel Crocker Lovell was a lifelong resident of Mansfield. Born in 1839, he would become one of the town's most revered citizens. And he was fortunate to be an eyewitness to history.



Samuel Crocker Lovell served in the Civil War. At Appomattox at the time of the surrender of General Robert E. Lee. As second lieutenant Lovell was chosen to lead an escort to deliver General Lee through Union lines back safely to Richmond.

Crocker Lovell (he was widely known by his middle name) attended Mansfield schools and Pierce Academy in Middleboro. He began his career as a clerk at stores in Foxborough, Taunton and Mansfield. Lovell was 22 when the Civil War broke out. He enlisted in the Union army as a private and rose to second lieutenant by war's end. He performed mostly picket, courier and escort duty as a member of the cavalry.

But it was the end of the Civil War that would provide Lovell a chance to witness history. He was at Appomattox at the time of the surrender of General Robert E. Lee. As second lieutenant Lovell was chosen to lead an escort to deliver General Lee through Union lines back safely to Richmond. Lovell later recalled the events at Appomattox and leading Lee's escort:

“To me it was a happy day, for it meant that the war was over and I was soon to return home. It was a sad day for Lee. I can see him now, disappointment written on every feature; brave as he was he could not keep back the tears. They coursed down his furrowed, browned face in great drops. Three days later I was in command of the cavalry troop that escorted the defeated general and his staff a

few miles beyond the Union camp. As we parted he grasped my hand and in convulsive but firm shakes bade me Godspeed and a safe return.”

Upon his military discharge Crocker Lovell returned to Mansfield with his beloved war horse, Black Billy. Lovell and Black Billy quickly became fixtures in the town’s Memorial Day parade. Lovell treasured a painted portrait of his faithful companion, especially after Black Billy’s death.



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Crocker Lovell went into business with his brother Isaac in 1866 selling groceries and provisions. By 1870 Isaac had built the Lovell Block at the corner of North Main and West streets. Isaac retained the grocery business while Crocker started a boot and shoe store. Upon Isaac’s untimely death Crocker took ownership of the Lovell Block, and was appointed postmaster from 1871 to 1886. The post office was located in the Lovell Block during that time. The building was known to later generations as George’s Cleaners. It was demolished in 2006.

Crocker and his wife Alice built a stately home diagonally across from the Lovell Block, at the corner of South Main and East streets. This allowed Crocker a view of the South Common from his front porch. Lovell served on the committee to beautify the town’s newly acquired common in 1874. He proudly held on to a

receipt showing that the committee completed the project under budget, returning exactly one cent to the town coffers. In the 1960s Lovell's home was moved over one lot on East Street to make room for a gas station.

Crocker Lovell remained vigorous until shortly before his death at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston on October 17, 1918. He was 79 years old. His Civil War diaries, dating from 1861-1865, and the portrait of Black Billy remain in the possession of the Mansfield Historical Society.

Kevin McNatt and Andrew Todesco are members of the Mansfield Historical Society. They can be reached at mansfieldhistoricalsociety@yahoo.com. Follow the society on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.