

**“TO PROTECT THE UNION”:  
CIVIL WAR HISTORY IN CENTRAL SQUARE**

**ATTENTION**  
**VOLUNTEERS**

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**All persons desirous of joining  
a VOLUNTEER COMPANY to protect the Union of the  
United States, are invited to meet in**

**FRANKLIN HALL,**  
**On FRIDAY EVENING NEXT,**  
**AT 7 1/2 O'CLOCK.**  
**J. P. RICHARDSON.**  
**CAMBRIDGEPORT, January 17, 1861.**

**CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS**

# **“to protect the Union”: Civil War History in Central Square Cambridge, Massachusetts**

Cambridge Historical Commission, January 2012

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## “HERE IT IS, BOYS!”

On April 15, 1861, when President Lincoln called for volunteers following the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter, Cambridge was ready. In January, James Richardson, a lawyer in Central Square, had organized a company of local men for the looming conflict.

I had to endure a fire of raillery and sarcasm, from nearly everyone I met . . . . Squibs were published in the local paper making fun of my warlike preparations and every would-be wit seemed to think it the best joke of the day.

But Richardson had the backing of Governor John Andrew and when the call came his 97 men would become Company C, 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteer Militia.

The night of April 16<sup>th</sup> was chill and stormy, and Richardson was waiting impatiently in his law office when:

A tall man, in a rubber overcoat and a sou'wester hat dripping with rain, came in. . . . He took an official-looking paper from his pocket and handed it to me. . . . It was an order from the Governor to appear forthwith . . . with my company for service. Holding it above my head, I shouted, “Here it is, boys! Go down to Pike’s stable, get a horse apiece and notify every member of the company to be here at my office by daylight tomorrow morning.”

The company marched to the State House on the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup>, becoming the first Massachusetts unit mustered into service. The men boarded a steamer in Boston Harbor, and, a day later, were headed for Fortress Monroe in Virginia, where they served a three-month enlistment. Returning to Boston, the company was mustered out, and most of its members joined newly formed regiments.



Image: James P. Richardson in his captain’s uniform in 1861. Courtesy of Mrs Edwin R. Sparrow, “Colonel Richardson and the Thirty-Eighth Massachusetts,” by Richard C. Evarts, *Proceedings of the Cambridge Historical Society*, Vol. 39

## Atlas Details

This detail from an 1873 Cambridge atlas shows sites related to Richardson and the mustering of the Civil War company.

Both the lawyer's office and Franklin Hall, where the volunteers were invited to meet, were in the building owned by R. Lamson (outlined in orange; now 559-563 Massachusetts Avenue). The company drilled in Washington Hall inside Wood's Block (in blue; now 571 Mass. Ave.). In 1861, the livery stable in the center of the block (in purple) was owned by James Pike (and entered via the narrow passage at the red arrow).

Main Street was later renamed Massachusetts Avenue, and Austin Street became Bishop Allen Drive.

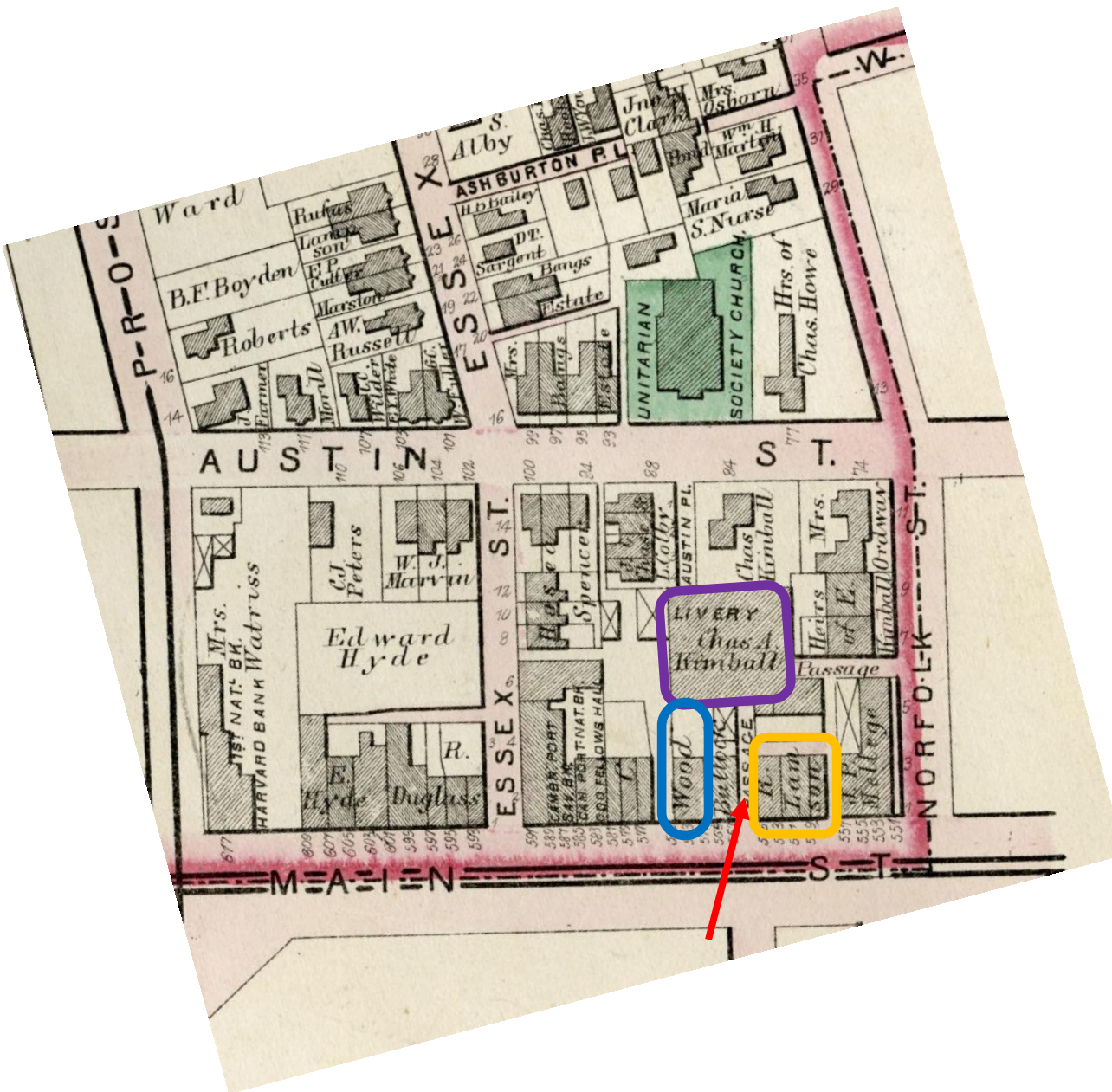


Image: *Atlas of the City of Cambridge*, 1873 (detail plate J)

## CIVIL WAR HISTORY IN CENTRAL SQUARE



This 1907 photograph shows the brick Lamson Block at the right, which housed both the office of attorney James Richardson and Franklin Hall, where his recruits gathered in mid-January 1861 (when the building was only two stories tall). The four story, white-faced building at the left replaced the earlier brick Wood's Block; Washington Hall, where Company C drilled in the months before it was called up, was probably above Bird's Pharmacy. Between the two brick buildings is the passage that led to Pike's stable (note the sign advertising a boarding stable).



## Central Square Details

On the night of April 16<sup>th</sup>, Richardson excitedly ordered a few men to “go down to Pike’s stable [and] get a horse apiece.” Pike’s was here (photo at left), in the area behind Lamson and Wood’s blocks. The 1907 photograph looks west toward Essex Street—the photographer was standing on the roof of what had once been Pike’s stable.

The photo at right offers another view of the Lamson Block, the brick building on the left. The Paradise, at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Norfolk Street, was a vaudeville theatre.

These two photographs, as well as the one on the preceding page, were taken in 1907 by the Boston Elevated Railway Company to document buildings along the planned route of the new subway from Park Street to Harvard Square (today’s Red Line).



## THE MEN OF COMPANY C

James Richardson was known as a “fire buff,” and many of the firefighters stationed at the Engine No. 2 firehouse (787-789 Main Street, here at left) were among the first to join his “company to protect the Union.” The firehouse, built in 1852, was designated a City Landmark in 1989. It now houses the Christian Mission Holiness Church.



Image: Union No. 2 Engine House, 787-789 Main Street (at left), photo 1894.  
 Courtesy Christian Mission Holiness Church, Cambridge Historical Commission

### *Place of birth*

Cambridge	20
Boston	16
Massachusetts	11
New England	18
Canada	8
Ireland	8
England & Scotland	7
Other US	3
Unknown	6

### *Height*

6' +	8
5'6"-5'11"	55
5'-5'5"	28
Unknown	6

### *Residence at Enlistment*

Cambridge	69
(lower Cambridgeport	22)
Boston	8
Massachusetts	8
Unknown	12

### *Leading Occupations*

Printer, bookbinder	21
Clerk	11
Carpenter	7
Cigar-maker	5
Farmer	3
Soap-maker	2
Professional	3
(lawyer, physician, police officer)	

### *Age at Enlistment*

0-19	25
20-29	63
30 +	3
Unknown	6

### *Casualties*

Killed in action	6
Died of wounds and disease	6

None of the men died during their initial deployment with Company C.

## COMRADES IN COMPANY C

### 1ST LT. CHAMBERLAIN

Samuel Chamberlain has been described as “probably the most colorful member of Company C”—a description that is hard to contest. He left Massachusetts when only a teenager and served as a cavalryman in the Mexican War, sketching scenes of combat at Monterey and Buena Vista and writing a lively account of his exploits on and off the field,

suggestively titled *My Confession*. When the war ended, Chamberlain returned home, married, and was serving as a Cambridge police officer when the Civil War broke out. As the only member of Company C with military experience, he was commissioned its first lieutenant. He later served in the 1<sup>st</sup> Massachusetts Cavalry Regiment and commanded the 5<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Cavalry Regiment, an African American unit. Charles Francis Adams, a fellow cavalry officer, recalled Chamberlain as “a large, rough, self-made man [who] had been wild and adventurous in his youth. . . . Wholly lacking in refinement and education, he was a dashing fellow in his way; and on the whole I fancy the best officer in the regiment.”

After the war, Chamberlain became superintendent of the State Arsenal on Garden Street and was later warden of the Charlestown State Prison. He died in 1908.

Chamberlain is honored still—if only at a distance. In 1869 the competition to design the city’s Civil War monument was won by the Cambridge twins, Cyrus and Darius Cobb, who chose the former lieutenant as their model for the bare-headed, mustachioed rifleman atop the memorial. The *Cambridge Chronicle* noted that the Cobbs had been “in the Army during the Rebellion [serving with the 44<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Infantry in North Carolina], which makes the success of their design particularly gratifying to their comrades.” (17 April 1869) After the war, they had studios on Tremont Street in Boston.



It would be another 67 years before the memorial was completed by the installation in the central arcade of a statue of Abraham Lincoln by Augustus Saint-Gaudens.



## DR. HOLT, COMPANY SURGEON

Alfred Holt had just opened his medical practice at the corner of Main (now Massachusetts Avenue) and Norfolk streets in Central Square (likely adjacent to James Richardson's law office) when he joined the unit being mustered by Richardson.

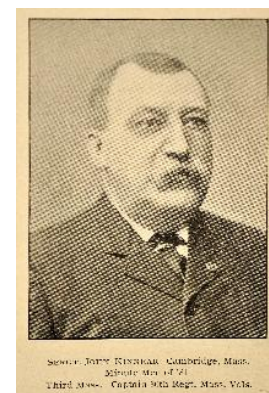
Born in New Hampshire in 1838, Holt studied medicine with a local doctor, then attended medical school at both Harvard and the University of Vermont, receiving his degree in June 1860. After his service with Company C, he was appointed assistant surgeon of the 30<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment. He later served as medical officer of the 1<sup>st</sup> Texas Cavalry during campaigns in Louisiana and Texas and ended the war as its commanding officer.

Dr. Holt returned to Cambridge and resumed his medical practice, living at 8 Pleasant Street (now part of the Central Square Post Office site). He was appointed the city's medical examiner in 1879 and was chief health officer from 1880 to 1889. He died in 1891. In a report presented to the Cambridge Historical Society in 1912, Holt was described as "very efficient in the use of the microscope" and his work in the medical field "of a very high order."

## SGT. KINNEAR

John Kinnear was born in 1838 in Glasgow, Scotland, one of 23 members of Company C born outside the United States. He immigrated to the States as a child and grew up in Cambridge and worked as a printer. As war loomed, he was as eager to serve as Richardson and joined his volunteer unit. When Company C was mustered, Kinnear was appointed one of its sergeants. He later served as first lieutenant in Company E, 30<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Regiment, which saw action in campaigns along the Mississippi River and was involved in the pursuit of Confederate forces in northern Virginia, losing 127 men at the Battle of Cedar Creek.

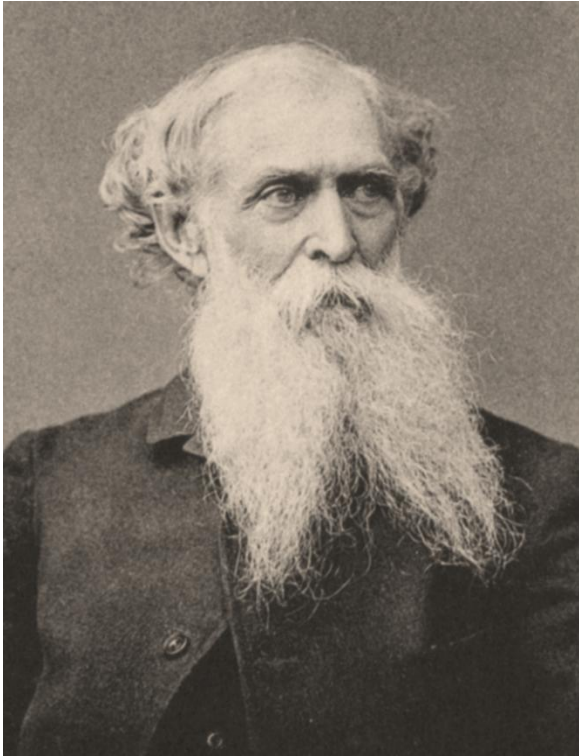
After the war, Kinnear came back to Cambridge and soon turned to a career in state government. Appointed a messenger in the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1880, he became first clerk of the Sergeant-at-Arms in the 1901 session.



Kinnear died in 1928, leaving \$10,000 in trust "for the purpose of having forever kept alive, preferably by an annual banquet on April 17, the memory of Company C." No record has been found of a banquet ever being held.

## CAPTAIN RICHARDSON'S WAR

After Company C was mustered out, Captain James Richardson took command of one of the three Cambridge companies in the newly formed 38<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Regiment, which first saw action in Louisiana. When its commander was killed in action, Richardson, who was lieutenant colonel, stepped in to serve as the unit's commander until the end of the war.



In September 1864, Richardson wrote from Virginia to a Cambridge friend, describing the eve of the Battle of Opequon Creek.

Towards sunset the rain had stopped, and I mounted my horse and rode towards General Sheridan's headquarters. . . . Just as I got there, I saw General Grant and Sheridan come out of the tent, talking together. Grant mounted his horse and started in the direction of Harper's Ferry. . . . I immediately turned my horse and rode back to camp. The officers of my staff were standing around a fire drying their clothes. I said, "Well, gentlemen, you may get ready for a fight tomorrow." They asked if I had got my orders. "No, but General Grant has been with little Phil today and has just left for Washington; and that means a general engagement as sure as you were born." Within fifteen minutes one of the general staff officers rode rapidly up and handed me a written order. It said, "Be prepared to move at two o'clock tomorrow morning."

As Richardson rode along the line of the regiment as it prepared to move out, he recalled, "I knew every man would do his full duty. And I felt proud as I remembered that their discipline was such that no matter how much excited they became, the whole would move together as directed by my voice." Richardson was wounded in the battle and carried from the field. When his turn came to be treated at the field hospital, "the bullet was found and cut out and the wound dressed with cold water only. A stimulant of whiskey was given me, and I was left to continue my observations" of the battle. He returned to duty before the end of the year.

Image: Captain Richardson in 1886. Courtesy of Mrs. Edwin Sparrow, "Colonel Richardson and the Thirty-Eighth Massachusetts" by Richard C. Evarts. *Proceedings of the Cambridge Historical Society*, Vol. 39

## Richardson moves to Texas

The war ended in April 1865. The 38<sup>th</sup> was mustered out in July, and Richardson led the remnants of his unit “with its faded shot-torn colors flying” in a grand march across the river from Boston into Cambridge. The *Cambridge Chronicle* called it the greatest day Cambridge had ever known.

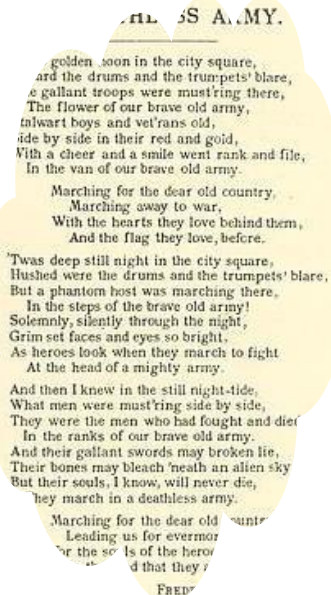
When Richardson formed Company C in 1861, he was living with his wife, Jane, and their four children at 107 Western Avenue (circled) and practicing law in Central Square. Richardson, however, decided not to stay in the city and rebuild his practice. Instead, he joined the regular army and was posted to Texas, where he served with the 17<sup>th</sup> U.S.

Infantry with headquarters in Austin; he was also an agent for the Freedman’s Bureau. When Texas was readmitted to the Union in 1870, Richardson resigned his commission and was appointed by the carpetbag administration as a judge in the state courts. He lost his job when the Democrats regained control of the state and started his own law practice in Austin. In an 1897 interview with the *Chronicle*, Richardson said that his association with the people of Texas, “especially with the old rebels, has been very friendly and intimate.” Life there, he said, was “quiet and orderly. The desperadoes have been killed off,” and “the old animosities of the war have about died out.”

His family had remained behind in Cambridge, perhaps, as one writer suggested, because his wife “was quite out of sympathy with her husband’s adventurous spirit.” Mrs. Richardson died in Cambridge in 1893. Captain Richardson died in Texas in 1901. “The Deathless Army” was sung during a memorial service held at the Austin Street Unitarian Church. His three daughters attended, but his son, Louis, a lawyer in Chicago, did not. Richardson is buried in Cambridge Cemetery.

Map: *Atlas of the City of Cambridge*, 1886 (detail plate 14)

Lyrics: “The Deathless Army,” lyrics by Frederic E. Weatherly. National Library of Australia



**HONORING COMPANY C**

**COMPANY C, THIRD REGIMENT  
MASS. VOLUNTEER MILITIA**

**ATTORNEY JAMES RICHARDSON MUSTERED  
THE FIRST UNIT TO ANSWER PRESIDENT  
LINCOLN'S CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS.**

**OF THE ORIGINAL 97 MEN,  
85 SURVIVED THE WAR.**

**APRIL 17, 1861**

As part of Cambridge's recognition of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the Civil War, Captain Richardson and the men of Company C were honored with a historic marker.

The plaque was installed by the Cambridge Historical Commission in Central Square near the site of Richardson's law office.

## COMPANY C, TOGETHER AGAIN



In 1886 the surviving members of Company C posed for a photograph in front of City Hall (then at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Pleasant Street). Captain Richardson, with the great white beard, and Lieutenant Chamberlain, beside him in the slouch hat, stand proudly in the front row. Charlie Cobb, the unit's drummer, is to the left with the drum he had carried through the war. Richardson was living in Texas by then, but he returned to the city in April 1897 for a dinner of the First Volunteers' Citizens Association and recalled his wartime experiences in an interview with the *Cambridge Chronicle*. Cambridge, wrote the reporter, "honors herself in honoring him."

## GRAND ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC

The Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) was a fraternal organization created by and for Civil War veterans. Founded in 1866 on the principles of fraternity, charity, and loyalty, it was active until 1956 when its last member died. The G.A.R. became one of the first organized advocacy groups in American politics, supporting voting rights for African American veterans, lobbying the U. S. Congress to establish veterans' pensions, and supporting candidates for office.

This brass pin is a Grand Army of the Republic badge from the William H. Smart Post No. 30 in Cambridgeport. The post was named in honor of William H. Smart, a “turner” (a woodworker skilled at turning wood on a lathe) from Cambridge. He was twenty and studying for the ministry when he enlisted in Company G of the 1<sup>st</sup> Massachusetts Infantry on May 23, 1861. Private Smart was killed in action at Blackburn’s Ford, Virginia, on July 18, 1861, prior to First Bull Run, the first Cambridge man killed in the war.

Cambridge supported four G.A.R. posts. The Smart post first met on Pearl Street, but in 1883 began meeting every Thursday evening at 571 Main Street (now Mass. Ave.) in G.A.R. Hall—formerly known as Washington Hall, where Company C had drilled in early 1861, waiting for the war to begin.

