

# Camp Cameron

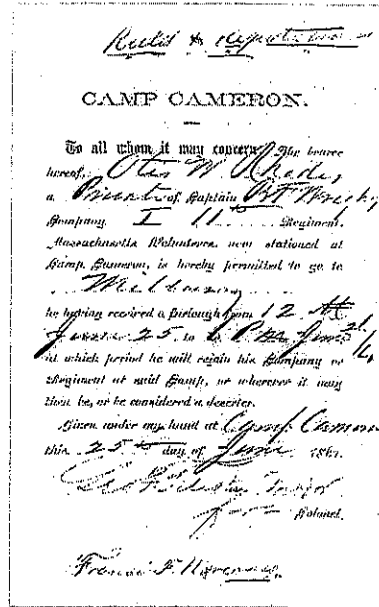
"We have suddenly awakened from a dream of security, and found ourselves in a war that seems destined to take its place among the great events of the world."

Cambridge Chronicle, May 4, 1861

The first company of troops enlisted to defend the Union was organized in Cambridge on April 13, 1861, two days before President Lincoln called for volunteers in the War of the Rebellion. Between 1861 and 1865, 4,588 Cambridge men enlisted in the Union Army and Navy.

The First Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteer Militia, mustered at Faneuil Hall in Boston and on June 1 marched out to North Cambridge. Their initial bivouac, on the muddy shore of Fresh Pond, was named Camp Ellsworth for a colonel of a New York regiment who had been killed in Virginia on May 24. The makeshift quarters were "very damp and unfit," however, and after two weeks the regiment moved to a still-unfinished encampment on Clarendon Hill.

Named for Simon Cameron, President Lincoln's Secretary of War, Camp Cameron occupied a 140-acre tract along Massachusetts Avenue between Shea Road and Clarendon Avenue that extended up the hill to Holland Street in Somerville. Thirty wooden



Soldiers were forbidden to leave camp without a pass.

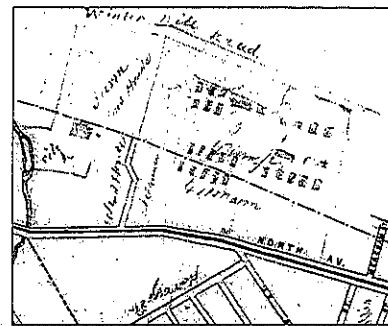
barracks sheltered about 1,000 recruits at a time who drilled for just a month before they were sent south.

Nearby farmers complained that the troops behaved badly. Security was improved after two barns were set on fire, but bounty-jumping remained a problem. Men who had enlisted solely to obtain a bonus could easily desert from the unfenced premises, so late in 1862 operations were transferred to the security of Fort Independence in Boston Harbor.

The camp sat vacant until after the Lexington & Arlington Railroad built a station nearby in 1870. Houses were put up on Cameron and Elmwood Avenues in Somerville in 1871-72. In the 1890s, Camp, Fair Oaks, Yorktown, and Malvern Streets and Seven Pines Avenue in Cambridge were laid out and named to commemorate battles fought by Massachusetts regiments.

#### Sources:

- Adams, Sampson, & Co. *The Massachusetts Register*, 1862.
- Cambridge Chronicle, May 4, June 8, June 22, Oct. 26, 1861; Jan. 11, Aug. 16, Aug. 23, 1862.
- Cambridge Historical Commission, *Report Five: Northwest Cambridge*, 1977.
- Warren H. Cudworth, *History of the First Regiment (Massachusetts Infantry)*, 1866.
- John J. Henderson, "Old Times in North Cambridge." Unpublished reminiscence, 1919.
- D. Hamilton Hurd, *History of Middlesex County*, 1890.



This sketch, made for the 1863 city directory but never published, is the only known map of Camp Cameron.

