



The Lakewood Historical Society

established 1952

June 2011



LETTERS HOME TO ROCKPORT

By Amanda Francazio

The society has studied copies of a large collection of Civil War letters written home to Rockport from Nathan Hawkins who served in the 103rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry. Nathan's letters to his wife Lucy Romp Hawkins provide personal views into the lives and families of the soldiers whom Nathan calls the "Rockport boys."

Many thanks to Shirley Henderson and Sabine Kretschmar who contributed to this article with their research. The society would like to thank the 103rd OVI Memorial Foundation, Deb Schell of Fairview Park Historical Society and Dale Thomas of Olmsted Historical Society for their time in answering our research questions and their organizations' archives and digital images relating to the Rockport boys.

Corporal Nathan Hawkins and the Rockport Boys

Nathan Hawkins of Rockport Township lived on a farm with his wife Lucy Romp Hawkins and his three daughters on Lorain Road, in what is now Fairview Park. Nathan, one of seven siblings, built his farmhouse at 21050 Lorain. His parents, Sally and Russell Hawkins, also from Rockport, were known to be abolitionists. It is believed that their home on Lorain Road was a station on the Underground Railroad. Lucy was the oldest daughter of William and Anna Romp who owned a large tavern on the corner of Columbia Road and Cedar Point Road in Olmsted Township. Lucy and Nathan's wedding took place in the Romp's tavern in 1853 and it was remembered as quite a social event.



Home of Nathan and Lucy Hawkins

When Nathan was 30 years old he enlisted in Co. G of the 103rd O. V. I. and rose to the rank of corporal. Nathan felt it was his patriotic duty to fight to preserve the union when he enlisted but wasn't sure how he felt about fighting for the freedom of slaves. Later as he experienced more of the war and saw the effects of slavery in the South, he was convinced that abolishing slavery was the right thing to do. In his strongest statements regarding his feelings about the injustices of the



Nathan Hawkins

day, he wrote, *"the more I see of slavery, the more I curse it . . . since seeing slavery and its consequences I have become an abolitionist but I believe there is a way to settle this matter without any further bloodshed."*

Nathan steadfastly wrote his wife Lucy, sometimes two or three times a week. He eloquently expresses concerns for his family and his Lorain Road farm, and discusses the politics of the war. He was torn between his duty to his country and the responsibilities to his family

at home. He writes of missing his three little girls, Libbie, Carrie and Nettie, and questions Lucy about the progress of the crops and his parents' health. He craves news from home and about the war and anxiously looks forward to receiving letters and newspapers.



Nathan, Lucy (nee Romp) and Libbie Hawkins



Frank and Margaret (nee Romp) Campbell

When Nathan writes of the Rockport boys he calls them his "family." At home in Rockport the men were neighbors; their families most likely attended school and church together. Some were related by marriage. Their homes were located on the west side of the Rocky River in the southwestern portion of Rockport Township which is in the Fairview Park area.

Also included in the group was Frank Campbell of Olmsted who was Nathan's brother-in-law and was married to Lucy Romp Hawkins' sister Mag.

The men most likely attended the same Rockport recruitment meetings and enlisted at about the same time. During the war they were tent mates, kept careful track of each other when separated, visited each other when ill, and wrote home with news of each other. *"My seat is my knapsack, my desk is my knee & a nice happy family are we, it is composed of R. Fleury, W. Coe, O. Jordan, A. Jordan, J. Gisner, Wm. Lewis, N Hawkins and I, we call it our home when we are in. Willie & Charley's tent is right behind us, we would get along well enough if we got more to eat..."* (Frank Campbell to Lucy Romp Hawkins, Sept. 28, 1862)

Nathan spent much time describing the food the soldiers ate. Like the rest of the soldiers, he grew tired of the rations provided by the Union Army. The rations typically consisted of biscuits (hardtack), coffee and salt pork. The soldiers would occasionally supplement their meals with food purchased from local peddlers and the camp sutler, but it was costly. They anxiously waited for food, shipped in boxes, from their Rockport families and friends. When their camps were located far away from railway lines and major roads, the soldiers would run out of rations and have to confiscate food from local farmers or go hungry. While encamped along the Cumberland River, their camps were surrounded by blackberry patches. The men were delighted to go berry picking.



Ohio soldiers eating hard tack

In their leisure time, the soldiers wrote letters, read, played card games, and base ball (an early version of baseball). They also did their laundry, cleaned and aired their tents, and repaired their uniforms. *"We have taken down our tents to day for the purpose of airing the ground. You have no idea how filthy a tent will get in one week, so much stuff accumulates, every one makes a little dirt, Willie Louis (Lewis) is the worst one I ever saw, as I have charge of the tent, I have to jaw him all the time, he will finish dinner, perhaps leave his plate and cup laying around, perhaps a chunk of meat and two or three hard breads.....go off and play ball."* (Nathan to Lucy, April 17, 1863)

Due to bad water, lack of good hygiene, and living in close quarters, many soldiers became ill. Soldiers would develop illnesses which Nathan describes as the "ague," bilious fever and typhoid fever and were moved to army hospitals. Rockporters Warren Coe and Johnny Andrews both died in Kentucky hospitals of illness in



SPOONING TOGETHER.

November 1862. *"I went to the hospital last night and took care of the sick ones. Jake and Warren are there yet and I am afraid that Warren will never be any better, he looks very bad..."* (Nathan to Lucy, November 21, 1862)

When the regiment joined General Burnside's campaign in the fall of 1863, Nathan wrote of the regiment's arduous move from Kentucky into Tennessee. They crossed the mountains of the Cumberland Gap in a line of soldiers and equipment ten miles long. Sometimes the soldiers, in their wool uniforms, marched over twenty miles a day in the southern heat. Some men died in these long marches or "tramps."



It is Nathan's first experience traveling to the South. He is impressed with the beauty of the countryside and the differences in climate and crops. He is suspicious of the citizenry of the towns and villages when they insist they are loyal to the Union. As the war wears on, he felt pity for the southern citizens, who were starving, and hopes the Confederates will quit fighting because of it.

He describes the destruction by the army of the Southerner's land, *"...Monticello was once quite a flourishing village, but war cruel war has made it a desolate town. Hope the people at home will take warning ere it is too late, but I fear not, we read in the papers that they are already preparing to resist the draft. I actually hope if they do resist that northern Ohio may see and feel the effects of an army passing through the country, when they have seen as much as I have of it they would shudder at the thought....when night comes and they go into camp you may look out for the fence rails to cook their grub with and then you*

may look again to your henroost, to the sheep and hogs. It makes no difference with your fence if you have ever so good a crop, the rails are all the same to the soldiers..." (Nathan to Lucy, June 23, 1863)



Andersonville Prison

Sadly, Nathan Hawkins did not survive the war. On January 19, 1864, he was captured near Dandridge, Tennessee, along with Ansel Jordan, and both died in Andersonville Prison of typhoid fever in 1864.

The day that Nathan Hawkins was captured, during a Confederate advance, he stayed behind in camp with two ill friends, Ansel Jordan and Adam Miller. In the event of retreat, their Captain had given them orders to fall back with the regiment's wagon supply train. The Captain was unaware that Nathan Hawkins had stayed behind. In the book *The Story of Fairview Park*, author Margaret Goebelt writes that Nathan stayed behind to help his friends, and all three were captured. After the incident, Lucy receives a letter from Capt. Pickands:

"On the night of the 19th our Red & Brig was ordered to the front from Dandridge where heavy skirmishing was taking place with Longstreet's advance. Adam Miller and Ansel Jordan privates of my Co were quite unwell and were ordered to remain at Camp & only move out in case the wagon train was ordered to the rear, and in the event to accompany the train. Corporal N.W. Hawkins remained in Camp with them without my knowledge. At 9 o'clock P.M. the train was ordered to the rear and these men with others who were in camp were told the army was falling back but it seems they disregarded the warning and in all probability remained



Nathan Hawkins gravestone



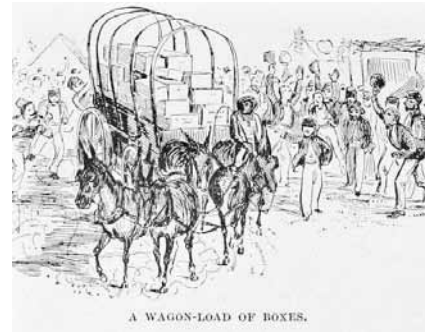
Ansel Jordan's gravestone

where they were... For several days I entertained the hope that the missing men would come in, trusting that they had eluded the foe and were working their way out of his lines but that they were captured is now almost beyond doubt..."

Lucy did not learn of Nathan's death until after the war. Nathan's gravesite is located at the Andersonville Prison Cemetery. His family placed a stone in Rockport Cemetery (now Fairview Park Cemetery) in Fairview Park as a memorial to his life and Civil War service. Nathan's original letters have survived and are preserved in the archives of the Olmsted Historical Society.

Boxes From Home

Soldiers welcomed "care packages" from friends and family in the Civil War, as do modern day U.S. soldiers stationed far from home. Boxes containing homemade goods, such as pies, smoked meats, canned goods, butter and clothing often were brought by shipping agents and couriers to the soldiers' encampments. To save on the expense of shipping, families and neighbors of soldiers would combine their gifts in



A WAGON-LOAD OF BOXES.

one large box or crate. Express shipping companies were often used to ship the boxes. American Express, Wells Fargo and Adams Express profited during the Civil War and are still in existence today.

Soldiers looked forward to receiving the packages and shared their contents with their tent mates. Nathan Hawkins, in his letters home to Rockport, often complained about the quality of his army rations. He would often ask for special homemade items, especially his wife's delicious butter.

"We received our box on Friday and such a lot of good things and everything so nice.... I have eat more fried bread than you ever saw, your butter was very nice and the chicken too. The bread was dry and the fried cakes was too but they shall taste good.... tell father that those apples made me think of home more than anything else we had, they looked so natural and tasted the same, except the butter is so good. I gave the Lieutenant some of it he said it was the best he ever ate..." (Nathan Hawkins to his wife, November 23, 1862)

Silverthorn Tavern

Early issues of the Cleveland newspaper, *The Plain Dealer*, first published in 1842, can now be accessed online. When searching the early issues for news of Rockport in the Civil War era, evidence was found that Silverthorn Tavern, in Rockport Township, was a popular destination during the Civil War. Jacob Silverthorn purchased the tavern, formerly owned by Rufus Wright, on the west side of the Rocky River in 1853. The tavern, on three-quarters of an acre, was located where the Westlake Hotel now stands. After acquiring his new establishment,



Silverthorne Tavern

Jacob commenced to improve the building and grounds. He expanded the original tavern into a hotel and added rooms for dancing and eating. He kept fishing boats and tackle, sail boats and other necessities for water sports. A staircase was erected, leading from the riverbank to the hotel.

The tavern became a popular meeting place and landmark to Clevelanders as well as Rockporters. Steamers would arrive, carrying passengers from Cleveland for dinner and relaxation. Visitors strolled the tavern's grounds which contained a fountain and a grove of trees, and enjoyed the lake breezes.

During the Civil War, an 1862 *Plain Dealer* article describes a function held at the tavern. Jacob Silverthorn, described as a patriot, donated the use of his tavern to the Rockport Ladies' Aid Society for fund raising dances. During one festival of the Ladies' Aid Society, it was said that the tables "groaned with the weight of a prepared feast" and "Leland's

Band," a military band from Cleveland, was in attendance and "discoursed sweet music for such as wished to trip the light fantastic." Funds were raised that night for the society which assisted soldiers

Party at Silverthorn's To-night.
The Soldiers' Aid Society of West Rockport, will give a party at SILVERTHORN'S this evening, Feb. 20th, for the benefit of their Society.— Tickets \$1.50. Mr. SILVERTHORN has generously given the use of his house.

Mrs. GEO. T. BARNUM,
FRANK WRIGHT,
J. H. SILVERTHORN,
GEO. B. MERWIN,
Managers.

serving in the war.

There is evidence that Mr. Silverthorn wrote to the Rockport Boys of Co. G. and most likely contributed items to gift boxes for the regiment. While encamped in Lawrenceburgh, Ky., Corporal Nathan Hawkins wrote to his wife, "...tell Mr. Silverthorn I should be glad to have him answer that letter of mine and he need not mind if he puts in a little rye in that box if it has not gone..." (Nathan to Lucy, Nov. 14, 1862)

After the war, Jacob Silverthorn sold his tavern to H. Patchen. Jacob then bought property on the east side of Cleveland and opened a new tavern. Several years later he returned to Rockport and purchased the tavern back from Patchen. Silverthorn Tavern was in operation until 1915, when it was razed. The Westlake Hotel was built on the site and contained a restaurant which was fittingly named "The Silverthorn."

Captain Moses Peixotto

Following Abraham Lincoln's call for 300,000 more volunteers in 1862, the Union army began the recruitment of thousands of volunteers from Cuyahoga County. Recruiting offices and training camps were opened in Cleveland. Captain Moses L. M. Peixotto was a former officer of the 7th Regiment Infantry Brigade of the New York Militia, known as the Silk

Stocking Brigade. He was commissioned as a captain of the 103rd O.V.I. and began recruiting for Company G.

Captain Peixotto came to Rockport Township looking for new recruits. Two recruiting meetings were held in Rockport in August 1862. The *Plain Dealer*, in articles reporting on the meetings, states "*Capt. Peixotto, by his manly and soldier like bearing and words made a most favorable impression...*" Stirring speeches were made and a gold watch was offered to the first man who signed up. Bounties were offered to the men who enlisted in Co. G, which would be led by 33-year-old Captain Peixotto.

RALLY TO THE RESCUE!
Excelsior Company!
108d Regiment.
MEN OF CUYAHOGA COUNTY!
In this hour of our Country's peril, you are called upon to rally to the defense of the most precious rights of freemen—
The Preservation of the Union!
Lose not a moment but come at once to Headquarters, and unite with the name of soldier the proud title of Patriot.
\$100 Bounty.
\$25 Paid in advance.
\$15 First Month pay in advance.
\$50 By the County of Cuyahoga.
\$2 For every man enlisted.
\$90 In all before you leave Camp Cleveland.
Rally at Once!
Come and Join!
CAPT. M. L. M. PEIXOTTO,
Formerly of the Seventh Regt., N. Y.
LIEUT. C. D. RUDOLPH.
Headquarters, Davis' Franklin Buildings,
408-410 Water street, Cleveland.

Records show that Moses Peixotto first appears in Cleveland in 1835 as a child. His father, Daniel Levi Peixotto, was a physician and moved his family to Cleveland from New York in 1835. The Peixotto family lived in Cleveland until 1841, when they returned to New York. Moses then reappears in Cleveland in 1862, sometime after he had served

in the N.Y. 7th Regiment Infantry Brigade. The brigade had earned fame as the NYC Volunteer Militia that was called to defend Washington D. C. in the beginning of the war, after the surrender of Fort Sumter. Moses had family ties to Cleveland. His brother Benjamin Franklin Peixotto, who had arrived in Cleveland before the war, was a prominent Cleveland citizen. Benjamin owned a large wholesale clothing business and was active in the Jewish American community as a founder of B'nai B'rith and the Jewish Orphan Asylum. He also was an editorial writer for the *Plain Dealer*.

Captain Peixotto's brother Benjamin was known as a gifted orator. He accompanied the captain to the Rockport recruitment meetings where he and others delivered speeches to persuade the men to join the Union Army.

In his letters Corporal Nathan Hawkins writes of Capt. Peixotto, who seemed to have the admiration of the Rockport boys. The Captain's commission with Co. G was short-lived as he was given a physician's disability and resigned his commission in December 1862. "...the Captain started for Lexington this morning with the intention of going home but he could not tell as he did not know if he could get leave of absence. He came and bade me goodbye and said he was going home if he could. I told him he must go out and see you, he said he

War Meeting at Rockport.
There was a fine war meeting at Algors, near Rockport, last evening. The Church of the village was crowded, and eloquent speeches were made by Judge F. W. BINGHAM, ALBERT T. SLADE, Esq., B. F. PEIXOTTO and Capt. PEIXOTTO, the latter, at the close of the meeting, recruiting some of the best material in the village as members of his company. Capt. PEIXOTTO, by his manly and soldier-like bearing and words made a most favorable impression, and a still larger number of recruits are expected from the township. Turn out and fill up Captain Peixotto's company.



would if he went home. I hope he will for he is a good man and you will like him too. I think he will resign and leave the service entirely on account of his health..." (Nathan Hawkins to his wife, Dec. 16, 1862)

There is evidence that Moses returned to Cleveland and worked in his brother's wholesale clothing business, which his brother eventually turned over to him. In 1867, he closed his struggling business and returned to New York City, became a pharmacist and was active in the city's Jewish- American community. In 1890 he passed away "in consequence of wounds received and disease contracted in service." (1895 *Directory of Jewish American Civil War Veterans*)

NO HUMBUG.
—
Great Bargains
—IN—
CLOTHING!
—FOR—
Thirty Days.
—
MEN AND BOYS CLOTHING
Of every Variety and Style. Now is the time to buy.
DAVIS, PEIXOTTO & CO.,
feb3 Corner Water and Superior streets.

His brother Benjamin Franklin appears to have written of Moses' war experiences and time in the army hospital in *The Jewish Messenger* in 1866. After the war, Benjamin moved to San Francisco, was a successful attorney and eventually became the U.S. Consul in Romania and France under

President Grant.

Sources: *Plain Dealer Historical Archives*, www.clevelandjewishnews.com, *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, *1895 Directory of Jewish American Civil War Veterans*; www.JewishEncyclopedia.com

Some Battles and Operations of the 103rd:

Fortification of the city of Frankfort, Ky.; winter of 1862 – 1863

Actions in Monticello, Ky. and Central, Ky.; April & May, 1863

Duty in Central Kentucky until Aug. 1863

Joined General Burnside's campaign in Eastern Tennessee; Aug. – Oct. 1863

Siege of Knoxville (under Gen. Burnside); Nov. & Dec. 1863

Operations near Dandridge, Tennessee; Jan., 1864

Duty at Blains Crossroads, Jan. – April, 1864

Siege of Atlanta, Ga.; May to Sept., 1864

Operations in northern Georgia and northern Alabama; October, 1864

Nashville campaign; Nov. & Dec., 1864

Movement to Washington D. C.; Jan & Feb., 1865

Campaign of the Carolinas; Jan. – June, 1865

The Rockport Boys of the 103rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment

In the society's research, it was found that fourteen men from Rockport were enlisted in the 103rd O.V.I. in Companies C, E and G. By the war's end, nine of the fourteen had survived. Four died of disease, and one of wounds sustained in battle.

Co. C: Robert Bates

Co. E: John Andrews*; Allen T Jordan

Co. G: George Barker; Frank Campbell (from Olmsted Township); Warren Coe*; Thomas Farmer; Robert Fleury; Nathan Hawkins*; Ansel Jordan*; Orson Jordan; William W. Lewis**; William Thompson; George Thorn; Henry Whitehead

*died of illness; **died of wounds

103rd in Frankfort, KY

The regiment spent the winter of 1862 and 1863 encamped near Frankfort, Ky. The regiment built Fort Hill which fortified the town. Today, the original fort is preserved in a military park owned by the city of Frankfort.