

"Now is the Time of Our Country's Need": Geneva and the Civil War

The Civil War (1861 – 1865) touched every community in the United States. Villages all over the country debated if the Union and the Confederacy should go to war, who should lead as President, and why the war was being fought. As months turned to years, more men went to war and returned maimed, or died and were buried far from home. The causes and outcomes of the war are still debated 150 years later. *"Now is the Time of Our Country's Need"* portrays how the war affected Geneva in the 1860s and how its impact is still felt today.



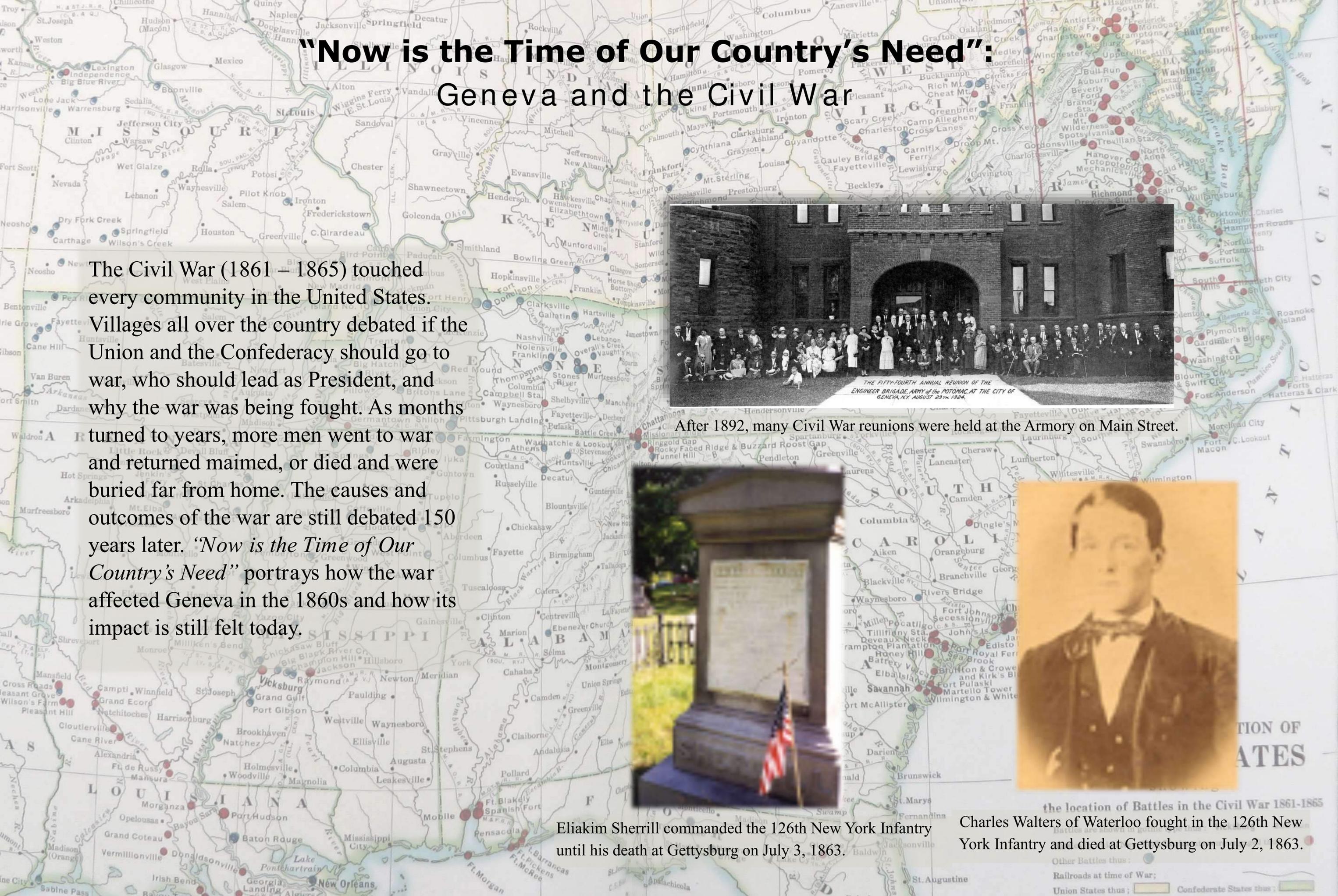
After 1892, many Civil War reunions were held at the Armory on Main Street.



Eliakim Sherrill commanded the 126th New York Infantry until his death at Gettysburg on July 3, 1863.



Charles Walters of Waterloo fought in the 126th New York Infantry and died at Gettysburg on July 2, 1863.



“Denied the privilege of a last fond look”: Mourning the Dead

In the 1800s mourning rituals were practiced privately at home. It was important to have a “good death”: at home surrounded by loved ones with a chance to offer last words and ask for and receive forgiveness. Funerals and wakes, with the body on display, were conducted at home. During the war, men died far from home with no family around them. If bodies were returned home, they were unfit for viewing due to decomposition. Monuments and memorials became important as a visible remembrance and a place to go mourn.



Popular before the war, mourning art was printed with a space for the name of the deceased soldier.

It is with much sorrow that we are called upon to record the death of our friend AMOS BRUNSON, formerly a student of Hobart College, and a member of the Senior Class. He died at Bottom Bridge on the Chickahominy, Va., on the 24th of May, of nervous fever. At the commencement of the war he nobly left the retired quiet of a student for the hardships and dangers of the battle-field, and volunteered in the 85th Reg't, Co. B, N. Y. S. V., where he served for a time as 2d Lieutenant,

young officer, whose death was a loss both to his country and the service. He was a young man of fine attainments, unblemished character, and loved and respected for his manly virtues by all who knew him. The Colonel and Adjutant of the Regiment attended him in his last moments, to whom he expressed regret at leaving his friends and relatives at so early a period of life. Bidding those about him good-bye, he died resigned to his fate—a “soldier of the Union”—in the 24th year of his age.

The closing of the obituary assures readers that the soldier was surrounded by comrades, if not family, to hear his final words.



The Thompson family stone in Washington Street Cemetery has one side devoted to son John who died at Gettysburg.

“Sitting by our genial firesides”:

Homefront

Genevans had the dual burdens of worrying about their men at war while carrying on with everyday activities. With the federal government unprepared for mobilizing and supporting large armies, local citizens provided clothing, blankets, and hospital supplies. Farms were critical for growing food for markets as well as for the army, but labor was scarce. Village boards gave financial assistance to families who lost their income when their men enlisted or, after 1863, were drafted.

FARMERS.—At this crisis in our country's history, let not the farmer forget to make ample provisions for food for the thousands now rallying to hold up untarnished and cause forever to float that Star Spangled Banner—the pride of the World. Our Freemen leave their peaceful abodes, believing and trusting that you will provide amply for them and the families left behind. The farmers should double the amount of ground heretofore used for the various seeds and permit not a foot of soil to become accountless. In time of war every enterprise should be the more vigorously prosecuted to counterbalance the influence drawn off by those filling the ranks. Farmers! you have a greater work to perform than even the bravest heart that faces the foe—yours and his interests are indissoluble. We entreat every farmer in the town of Seneca and old Ontario to feel that they have an individual responsibility resting upon them.

Wives and Mothers of Soldiers who are Prisoners of War, can obtain the back pay, due them while prisoners, by applying to H. C. Schell. War claim and Insurance Agency at National Bank building on Water St.



Adelaide Prouty (left), May 24, 1861: “Today Mother and I are as busy as bees making shirts for the second volunteer company [Company H, 38th Regiment] that are to leave on Tuesday. They are a shirtless, bootless forlorn company – too rugged to be decent.”