

Boylston Ties to the American Civil War in January 1865

By Inga Milbauer

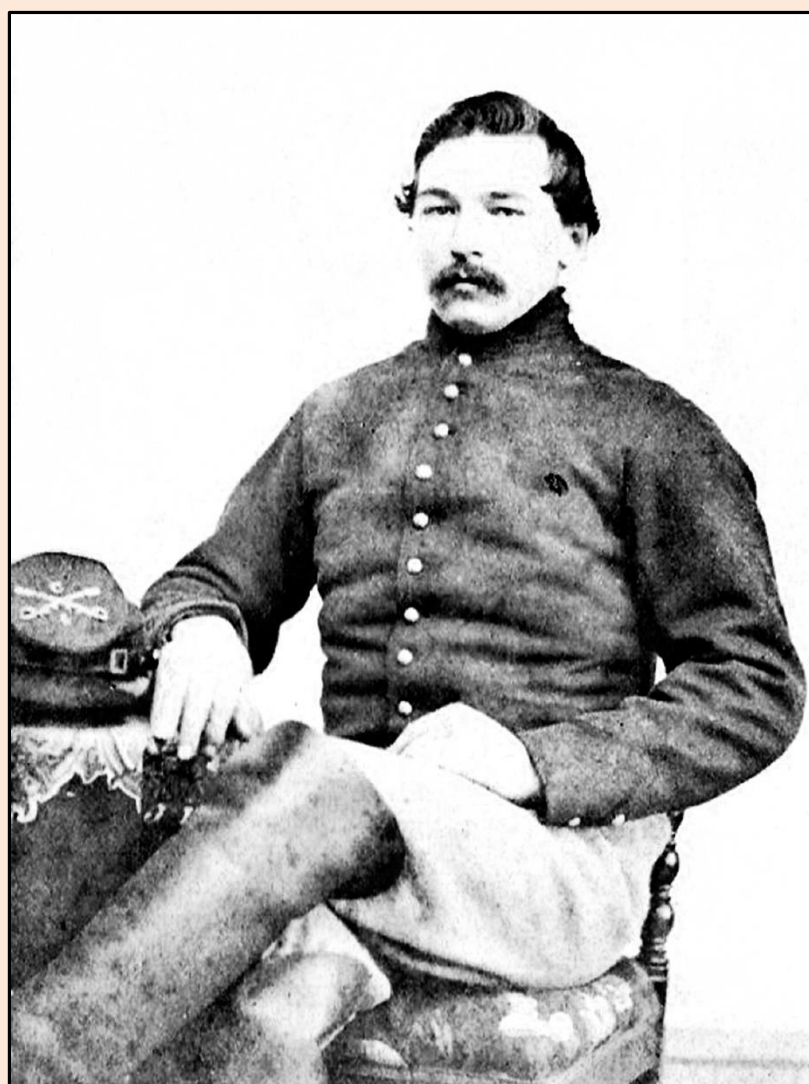
In January 1865, while the war still raged on, efforts to seek a peace settlement to end the war continued. Francis Preston Blair, a personal friend to both President Abraham Lincoln and Confederate President Jefferson Davis, was one of the people who had sought to broker a peace treaty in 1864. He travelled to Richmond, Virginia, on 11 January 1865 to meet with Jefferson Davis to discuss a plan to end the war. On 28 January, Jefferson Davis authorized three commissioners to explore options to end the war: Vice President Alexander H. Stephens, Senator Robert M.T. Hunter and Assistant Secretary of War John A. Campbell. On 3 February 1865 the Hampton Roads Conference took place aboard the steamboat River Queen in Hampton Roads, Virginia. The Confederacy was represented by the three commissioners. President Abraham Lincoln and Secretary of State William H. Seward represented the Union. The five negotiators could not agree on the peace terms, and Lincoln reported to Congress that the Hampton Roads Peace Conference “ended without result.”¹ Thus the war continued until General Grant called upon General Lee to surrender on 7 April 1865. On 9 April 1865 both Generals met at Appomattox Courthouse and agreed on the terms of the surrender. General Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia formally surrendered.

At the start of the American Civil War in 1861, the population of the town of Boylston, incorporated in 1786, had grown to 929 inhabitants. In addition to agriculture the Sawyers Mills section of town, with its production of cotton yarns and gingham cloth, had become Boylston’s industrial center. From this small community, 72 men went off to war to preserve the Union. All were volunteers and many were young men between the ages of 18 and 23 years old.

By January 1865, 23 men with Boylston ties were on active duty as most had either fulfilled their service terms, were ill, wounded and hospitalized, or had died from wounds or disease. Several of the 23 had re-enlisted in 1864, and four of them were prisoners of war in January 1865. The majority of the civil war veterans with Boylston ties served in infantry units, only four were in Cavalry units. Alfred Gilbert Larkin was one of them. He served in the 4th Regiment, Massachusetts Cavalry, Company C, 2nd Battalion.

Alfred Gilbert Larkin was born in Boylston, Worcester County, Massachusetts on 10 March 1842. He was the only child of Solomon Larkin and Mary Rice.² Alfred had many half siblings as both his parents had been married and widowed before. In 1860, Alfred was eighteen years old and lived with his parents on their farm in Boylston. “Solomon’s farm was 90 acres in total (60 improved, 30 unimproved) and had a cash value of \$2800. He had two horses, six milch cows, and four swine, the total value of which was \$400. The Larkin farm produced wheat, Indian corn and oats.”³

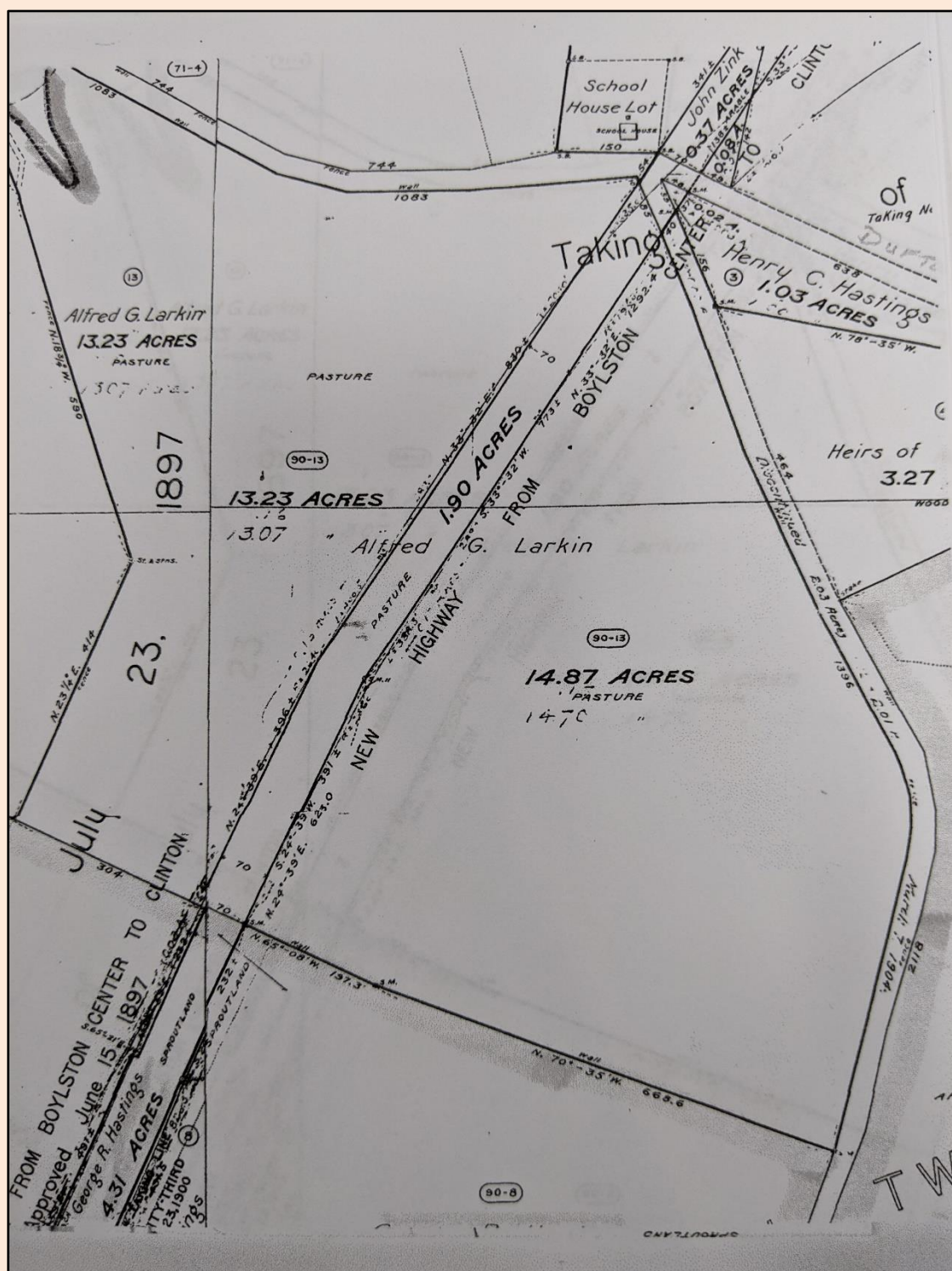
“On 16 December 1863, Alfred, a 21-year-old machinist residing in Clinton, Worcester County, Massachusetts, enlisted in the Union Army to fight the Confederacy. He mustered in the 4th Cavalry Regiment, Company C, in Readville, Boston, Suffolk County, Massachusetts on 6 January 1864 for a period of three years and was paid a \$25 bounty. He was immediately promoted from private to corporal on 6 January 1864. His military records describe him as 5 feet 5.5 inches in height, with grey eyes, dark hair and a dark complexion.”⁴



**CORPORAL ALFRED GILBERT LARKIN
4TH CALVARY REGIMENT, COMPANY C
BOYLSTON VETERAN**

The 2nd and 3rd Battalions of this Regiment were sent to Hilton Head, South Carolina. The second battalion left Boston on 20 March 1864 on the steamer *Western Metropolis* and arrived in Hilton Head on 1 April.

“Once there, the unit was assigned to picket and outpost duty. Alfred was absent on the muster rolls during May until November 1864 being on detached service at Folly Island, South Carolina under special order No. 227. Folly is one of the Sea Islands, barrier islands off the coast of Charleston. The 7-square mile island was occupied by Federal troops beginning in 1863 and was a major staging area for the Union Army attacking Confederate forces in the region. Battling jungle-like foliage, the soldiers constructed roads, forts, an artillery battery, and a supply depot. Eventually Folly Island had the capacity to hold up to 13,000 troops and their equipment. Beginning 26 November 1864, Alfred was at the headquarters of the battalion at the front through February 1865. He was promoted from corporal to sergeant on 20 October 1865, and less than a month later mustered out on 14 November 1865 in Richmond, Virginia. He was paid a bounty of \$140 upon discharge.”⁵



ALFRED G. LARKIN PROPERTY
Metropolitan Taking Map
Land Surveys for Wachusett Reservoir
July 23, 1897

After returning to Boylston, Alfred lived at the family farm. His father died on 9 May 1866. Alfred was 24 years old and continued to live with his mother at the farm until her death at home from a broken hip at age 94 years, 9 months and 10 days.⁶ “It was exactly at this time, March 1897, that the Metropolitan Water Board was petitioning the county commissioners to relocate a part of the highway from Boylston Center to Clinton. The new road would pass over the property of several Boylstonians, including that of Alfred Larkin. This petition was “one of the side issues resulting from the plan appropriating the greater part of the town of Boylston for the great water basin” that would come to be the Wachusett Reservoir.”⁷

Later that year, Alfred married Melvina Luce, daughter of Carlo B. Luce and Melvina A. Carvill, born to them in Lexington, Somerset County, Maine. The marriage took place on 15 November 1897 in Clinton, Worcester County, Massachusetts. The couple had one child, Iva Melvina Larkin, born on 30 September 1898 in Boylston. The family lived on Berlin Road in Boylston, but by 1920 moved to West Street, Berlin, Worcester County, Massachusetts.⁸

Alfred died on 19 April 1928, the next day his obituary appeared in the Worcester Evening Gazette:

Alfred G. Larkin
Berlin, April 20 --- Alfred G. Larkin, aged 86, a Civil War veteran, died at his home in West Berlin, yesterday after a brief illness. He was born in Boylston and purchased the Frank Wilder place in West Berlin, 10 years ago. He was a member of the E.D. Baker, G.A.R., in former years. His wife and one daughter, Mrs. Iva Popp of Clinton survive. Funeral services will be from the home tomorrow at 3 o'clock. Rev. F.A. Krackhand will officiate. Burial will be in the Woodlawn cemetery, Clinton, in charge of Undertaker W.E. King.⁹



GRAVESTONE OF ALFRED GILBERT LARKIN
Woodlawn Cemetery
Clinton, Massachusetts
Photograph courtesy of Merry Hill

Alfred's wife Melvina never remarried. She died on 20 December 1958, and was laid to rest next to her husband Alfred in Woodlawn Cemetery, Clinton.¹⁰

Alfred Larkin is just one of the many veterans with ties to Boylston whose stories are told in the publication *Boylston Civil War Veterans* by Leah Withers et al., published by the Boylston Historical Collaborative in April 2023. The book is available at the Boylston Public Library and for sale at the Boylston Historical Society and Museum.

Acknowledgements:

Boylston Civil War Veterans by Leah Withers, Patricia Kelleher Bartram, Nancy O'Loughlin Filgate, Elise Poretsky, Victoria Triolo, Julian Baldwin, Paige Money, Jordan Money, Isabella Uva, 2023, Boylston Historical Collaborative, Boylston, Massachusetts

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Editor, Nancy A. Filgate, Director, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc., Boylston, MA

¹ <https://www.nps.gov/foth/hampton-roads-peace-conference.htm>

² *Boylston Civil War Veterans* by Leah Withers, 2023, p. 54

³ *Ibid*, p. 55

⁴ *Ibid*, p.55-56

⁵ *Ibid*, p.56

⁶ *Ibid*, p.56

⁷ *Ibid*, p.56-57

⁸ *Ibid*, p.57

⁹ *Ibid*, p.58

¹⁰ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/193353885/melvina-larkin>