

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"The Civil War Soldier System"

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by Jay A. Graybeal

Several years ago I heard about a project to put the names of every Civil War soldier on computer using records at the National Archives in Washington, D. C. Researchers would be able to visit any National Park Service battlefield and use a computer to look for information about soldiers. As a researcher who has made frequent use of National Archives records, I was delighted to hear about this project. After several years of planning the project is now underway and the The Historical Society has recently agreed to assist in this nation-wide volunteer effort to create the "Civil War Soldiers System." This important project will involve the computer entry of millions of soldier names that can be accessed by visitors at Civil War battlefields. A project brochure provides details on how the system will work:

Q What will the CIVIL WAR SOLDIERS SYSTEM be?

The system will include a computerized database containing very basic facts about soldiers who served on both sides during the Civil War; a list of regiments in both the Union and Confederate Armies; identifications and descriptions of some of the major battles of the war; references that identify the sources of the information in the database; and suggestions for where to find additional information. The facts about the soldiers will be entered from records that are indexed to many millions of other documents about Union and Confederate Civil War soldiers maintained by the National Archives and Records Administration. Additional information about soldiers, regiments, and battles, as well as prisoner-of-war records and cemetery records, will be added over time.

Q What information will Civil War park visitors be able to obtain from the system?

Initially, the CIVIL WAR SOLDIERS SYSTEM will contain 5.5 million names of soldiers who fought in the Civil War, along with such information as whether the soldier was Confederate or Union and the soldier's regiment and rank. Historians have determined that approximately 3.5 million soldiers actually fought in the War; the records contain duplicates because some people served more than once and names were spelled or represented differently each time. Some soldiers even used aliases. The system will also identify the 7,000 regiments and units formed during the war; describe the major battles and skirmishes and identify the participating regiments and units; and provide the location of some of the soldiers buried in Civil War cemeteries managed by the Park Service.

Over time, the system will be expanded to provide additional information about individual soldiers; regimental histories; descriptions of more battles and skirmishes; more burial locations; and prisoner-of-war records. The system will identify the sources for all information in the database.

The Names Index Project will depend, in large part, on how many interested persons volunteer to sit at computer keyboards and enter the data from copies of the index cards to the database. Most of the input will be accomplished on home computers using software developed and provided free of cost by the project management. Any interested person who has ever typed or used a keyboard can be shown, in a few minutes, how to do what is needed. Each volunteer will determine the amount of time he/she will give to the effort.

If you would like to volunteer to help make the Civil War Soldier System a reality, please call me at the Historical Society (848-6494).

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Photo caption: Pvt. Hanson Thomas Murray, Co. H, 6th Regiment, Maryland Volunteer Infantry of Hampstead. His compiled service records at the National Archives were prepared from enlistment papers, regimental muster rolls, and hospital records. Pvt. Murray was wounded on November 27, 1863 at the Battle of Locust Grove, Va. A Federal surgeon amputated his leg on December 8th but Murray died on December 19th. His records will be entered in the Civil War Soldier System.