



Millerton American Legion Post 178  
Millerton NY

Veterans Day Tribute



## Lawrence Van Alstyne

By Sean Klay, Post Historian

For the last decade, the Millerton Post of the American Legion has conducted a Killed in Action Tribute to remember those who gave the ultimate sacrifice during a time of war from our community. Two years ago we expanded upon this idea to start a Veterans Day Tribute, to recognize the service of those who served and were fortunate enough to return home.

This year, I would like to continue by recognizing the service of Lawrence Van Alstyne, a veteran of the Civil War, known during his time as the War of the Rebellion, here in the North, and the war of Southern Succession or War of Northern Oppression in the American South.

Lawrence Van Alstyne was born August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1839, in Amenia NY to Samuel Van Alstyne (1791-1869) and Penelope Wyatt (1796-1869). Lawrence was possibly named after his paternal Grandfather who lived from (1767-1806). Their family, through both extended family and marriage, had exceptionally strong ties to North East, Amenia, Clavrack, and Hudson here in NY and Sharon CT. Lawrence was the youngest of 7 children, having 2 older brothers (William and John) and 4 older sisters (Mary Catherine, Jane, and Sarah).

The 1860 Lawrence was living here in the Town of North East according to the US Census taken that year, along with his parents, and working like his father, as a farm laborer. This is where he was living, when in November of that year, Abraham Lincoln was elected as the 16<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. By the time of his inauguration on March 4<sup>th</sup>, seven states, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas, had all succeeded from the union. Following the Confederate attack on Ft Sumter on April 12<sup>th</sup> and President Lincoln's call for 100,000 volunteers to suppress the rebellion, 4 more states of the upper south, succeeded, North Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, and Arkansas.



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The Civil War, remains the bloodiest war in American History. Recent historical research, has actually raised the human cost of this war in recent years from 650,000 killed to 750,000 killed. To give you one example of the horrific casualties that could occur in battle during this war, one only need turn to the story of the 14<sup>th</sup> Tennessee Infantry Regiment. When the unit left Clarksville TN in 1861, it left with 960 men. At the start of the Battle of Gettysburg on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1863, 360 soldiers remained. By the end of the first day 60 soldiers were left. By the end of the battle, there were only three.

Into this cataclysm stepped Lawrence Van Alstyne who on August 4<sup>th</sup> 1862, here in the Town of North East, he enlisted into the Army, joining the 128<sup>th</sup> NY Volunteer Infantry. Mustering into the Regiment one month later on September 4<sup>th</sup> at Camp Kelly, which occupied the fairgrounds in Hudson NY. There he learned he would join a Company B of the Regiment, and at the age of 23 immediately made a Corporal. After the unit was officially accepted into Federal Service, the unit found itself later that year on its way to Louisiana, and taking part in numerous expeditions there to expand Union control beyond the city limits of New Orleans. It would be here, in Louisiana, that Lawrence would get his first taste of battle in 1863.

His brother John also enlisted in 1862, and found himself in Company A of the 150<sup>th</sup> NY, the "Dutchess County Regiment". On July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1863 in his diary he notes that he learned from one of the Pine Plains papers circling around camp that his brother John had been killed at Gettysburg a few weeks before. In his diary he noted...

"Have just received a Pine Plains paper which says John Van Alstyne was killed at the Gettysburg fight. Dear me, what will father and mother do now? George Wilson of the same company and regiment is reported wounded. I have seen another paper giving the list of killed and wounded in the regiment and John's name was not in the list. On this peg I hang my hopes of a contradiction of this sad piece of news, and shall feel very anxious until I know the truth."

Sadly, for Lawrence, this was the truth. John was one of the 23,049 casualties suffered by the Union during the battle. The South suffered over 28,000 casualties during that battle. His brothers remain were laid to rest in the national cemetery in



Gettysburg, the same cemetery that would be dedicated later that year, where President Lincoln would give one of the most famous Presidential addresses in history.

On August 30<sup>th</sup> of that year, Lawrence now a Sergeant, was discharged from the enlisted ranks. The reason? He accepted a commission as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the 90<sup>th</sup> US Colored Infantry Regiment. The first regiments that were organized with black troops were first organized in Louisiana, and at that time known as “Corps d’Afrique”. It wouldn’t be till later, that these units would be known collectively as the United States Colored Troops.

What is interesting in reading about Lawrence, is how his opinions about the slavery question changed, from one of ambivalence, to being for abolition, and then going one step further and being willing to lead black soldiers, as an officer, into combat. This was no small thing. For in 1862, Confederate President Jefferson Davis issued his proclamation that stated that captured blacks would be treated as “slaves in revolt” and that “Officers of the United States in company of armed blacks would be executed.”

Lawrence was assigned to Company E of the 90<sup>th</sup> Infantry, where he would remain taking part in numerous expeditions and campaigns throughout the Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, theater of war. Apparently due to the combat losses, and losses due to disease, often forgotten as a chief killer during the war, General Sickles, in his General Order #88 dated 11 July 1864, ordered the consolidation of a number of units in the Corps d’Afrique, including the 90<sup>th</sup>. Those officers not being found any other postings for assignment, were discharged from Federal service to include Lawrence, who was discharged in August and returned home to New York.

Lawrence, like many soldiers who have over the years returned home from war wasted no time getting down the business of life, and within weeks married Mary Eggleston on October 4<sup>th</sup> 1864 and started his new life with her in Sharon CT.

In the years that followed Lawrence would write two books that I know of. The first was a survey of all the cemeteries in Sharon CT, and Amenia and North East NY, the second was his war diary, published under the title “Diary of an Enlisted man”. Both books were published shortly after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



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Lawrence and Mary had 4 children together, 3 daughters and son, the last born in 1887. Mary would pass away in 1914, and Lawrence would pass away in 1923 at age 84. He was laid to rest in Hillside Cemetery in Sharon CT.