

Civil Sam monument includes names of six brothers who served during Civil War

By Maurice “Christopher” Morley
As told to Ann Hauprich in May 2010

People sometimes look at me in disbelief when I tell them I started delivering telegrams in the village at the age of 10 in 1932. Their eyes widen even more when I begin to share stories I heard directly from the mouths of friends and relatives of Civil War veterans.

One of the stories the old-timers shared with me during that bygone era involved a local family whose patriotic legacy is hinted on at the Soldiers and Sailors Monument at the junction of Front and Low Streets. Because the statue of a Union soldier towers over the base of the war memorial near Wiswall Park that was officially dedicated in June 1888, most call the landmark by its nickname: Civil Sam.

What few today know is that the names carved into the sides of the monument include those of six brothers from a single family. The names of Arnold, Edwin, Frank, John, Richard and Thomas Spicer became extra special to me because I used to watch their youngest brother, Leander Spicer, walking along Malta Avenue on his way into the village. I never personally struck up a conversation with the then very old Mr. Spicer, but I remember he used a cane to push down his creepers and that he had special spikes for his shoes so he wouldn't lose his footing when the roads were slippery.

But it wasn't his manner of walking that fascinated me the most. I had been told that Leander – a jobber of cigars and tobacco who ran a wine and liquor store for many years at the corner of Milton Avenue and Washington Street — always expressed regret at not having served alongside of his six brothers during the war between the states.

The story I heard as a boy was that young Leander had walked all the way from Ballston Spa to Troy to try to enlist as a soldier in the Union Army, but when the officer saw his last name, he said: “Don't you have six brothers who are already fighting for the Union?” When the lad responded in the affirmative, he was told: “Go home and take care of your parents. They have already sacrificed enough.”

While the fate of the six brothers is not readily accessible, cemetery records show that Leander Spicer was born in August of 1845 and passed away in March of 1944 – one year shy of his 100th birthday.

The same cemetery records reveal that John T. Spicer died at the age of 32 years in February of 1866. The names of Francis L. Spicer and William Spicer also show up in the very old Ballston Spa cemetery records, but the dates of their deaths are illegible. A later cemetery record contains the name of Thomas Spicer and lists the year of his death as 1886. No local burial records seem to exist for Arnold or Edwin Spicer – although a more thorough investigation of military records would surely shed additional light on their respective fates.

Another story I enjoy sharing about the monument is how it came to the village in pieces on a train that pulled into the D & H station that was once a beehive of commercial and passenger activity where Manna's Restaurant & Banquet House now stands.

Great preparations were made for the dedication ceremony that followed its assembly. Public buildings, stores and throughout the village were decorated in patriotic colors and a grand parade was led by Doring's Band of Troy and the Saratoga Citizens' Corps. Adding to the processional festivities were the Troy Citizen's Corps (with 100 men) as well as two drum corps of 18 men each, 13 Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) Posts, six fire companies, several societies and a long line of carriages.

Photograph of Civil Sam as the monument honoring village soldiers and sailors looked when protected by a wrought iron fence around the turn-of-the-century courtesy of the Maurice "Christopher" Morley Collection.



The dedication ceremonies reportedly began at two o'clock sharp with the singing of a number titled "Keller's American Hymn" by the Ballston Musical Association. Historic accounts state "37 little girls attired in national colors sang The Star-Spangled Banner" followed by orations by the Hon. William J. Parkinson and General Daniel Butterfield. An epic dedication poem written by Fred Emerson Brooks of San Francisco was read to the crowd by John Person. Credit for the monument was awarded on that date to several citizens who had worked diligently behind the scenes to bring the monument to the village.

The monument was originally framed by a wrought iron fence, however, it had to be removed after it was damaged by an automobile. Today beds of flowers are tended beneath the names of those from the village who served in all of the wars involving American soldiers and sailors that had taken place up until 1888.



On a humorous note, Civil Sam and Chris Morley once earned a mention in a July 1970 newspaper column written by Ellen Qua who, like Mr. Morley, continued to enjoy working after her 80th birthday. Before she passed away in the 1990s, Ellen expressed sadness that Civil Sam was holding a weapon. She felt a flag would be a more patriotic symbol. Mr. Morley couldn't resist making sure she had a miniature replica of the statue for her desk – with Sam holding a flag instead of a rifle.