



The following article may be use free of charge with no prior authorization provided that it is used for nonprofit purposes and appears with the author biography at the end of this article intact. Please [email us](#) with any details of its use so that we can keep the author or other interested parties informed of the use of this article.

# Corporal Tanner, Weston Mickel, and the Civil War

*Jackie Turnquist*

Everyone was treated to a memorable evening on November 12 when Peter Lindemann presented “Corporal Tanner and other Civil War locals”.

The program focused on Corporal James Tanner, born on April 4, 1844, who grew up on a farm in Richmondville and became a school teacher. When the Civil War broke out, Mr. Tanner enlisted in the army, joining the 87th New York Voluntary Infantry. He was in Williamsburg, Yorktown, and Fair Oaks. He was severely wounded at Manassas by an explosion which tore off one foot and destroyed the other. Taken to a field hospital, both legs were amputated below the knee. Tanner was a prisoner for 10 days and was then paroled – he recovered in a hospital. He was 18 years old.

He was discharged and returned to Richmondville, where many people talked with him because the “heard the battle cry of freedom”. He was fitted with prosthesis and went to the American Business College in Syracuse. In 1864 he worked at the State Assembly in Albany, then the War Department in Washington, also studying stenography. He returned to Richmondville again in 1865 and studied law under Judge William C. Lamont. He married Muriel White of Jefferson, and they were together for 40 years before she was killed in an auto accident in Helena, Montana.

In 1869 he was admitted to the Bar and earned a reputation as a public speaker – he was known as “the legless soldier orator”. He campaigned for Benjamin Harrison in Indiana, and is credited with winning him Indiana and the presidency. Tanner went on to become the U.S. Commissioner of Pensions and also served as Commander in Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic.

While Lincoln was president, Tanner took a job with the Ordinance Department. His office was in a room next to the Peterson House, across from Ford’s Theater. When Lincoln was shot, he was carried to Peterson House. A call went out for someone who knew shorthand to take depositions from witnesses. Mr. Tanner stepped up and took depositions, including one from Harry Hawk who was the only actor on stage when Lincoln was shot.

Mr. Lindemann personalized the program by discussing the 34 men from Carlisle who went to war,

particularly Weston G. Mickel, several descendents of whom were in the audience. Weston Mickel was a Color Sergeant who carried his regiment's colors in The Grand Review.

The Grand Review occurred in Washington D.C. on May 23 and 24, 1865, 38 days after Lincoln's death. It was a celebration of the end of the war. On day one, the Army of the Potomac, led by General Meade, marched. It took over 6 hours for the miles of troops to pass. The Western Army of Tennessee marched on the second day. There were an estimated 200,000 spectators, including Ulysses S. Grant, George Armstrong Custer and President Andrew Jackson. This was a watershed moment for the country, as it had to be recognized the power inherent in that huge standing army. The Battle Flags were the biggest attraction due to their bloodstains and bullet holes – visible evidence of the fallout of war. Weston Mickel's job of carrying the colors for his regiment was a huge honor. During Mr. Lindemann's presentation, Mickel's sword was displayed.

Enhancing the presentation were the recitation of poems by Mr. Lindemann, including excerpts from "The Prelude" by William Wordsworth and "O Captain! My Captain!" by Walt Whitman, and Roger Shaefer, who played guitar and sang - with the audience accompanying - several typical songs of the time.

### **O Captain! My Captain!**

O Captain my Captain! Our fearful trip is done,  
The ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won,  
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,  
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;

But O heart! Heart! Heart!  
O the bleeding drops of red,  
Where on the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! My Captain!  
Rise up and hear the bells;  
Rise up—for you the flag is flung for you the bugle trills,  
For you bouquets and ribboned wreaths for you the shores a-crowding,  
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;

Here Captain! Dear father!  
This arm beneath your head!  
It is some dream that on the deck,  
You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;  
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will;  
The ship is anchored safe and sound, its voyage closed and done;  
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;

Exult O shores, and ring O bells!  
But I, with mournful tread,  
Walk the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead. -

*Walt Whitman*

### **Just Before the Battle Mother**

Just before the battle, Mother, I am thinking most of you  
While upon the field we're watching, with the enemy in view.  
Comrades brave are 'round me lying, filled with thoughts of home and God;  
For well they know that on the morrow, some will sleep beneath the sod.

*Chorus:* Farewell, Mother, you may never – press me to your breast again;  
But, oh, you'll not forget me, Mother – if I'm numbered with the slain.

Oh, I long to see you, Mother, and the loving ones at home,  
But I'll never leave our banner till in honor I can come.  
Tell the traitors all around you that their cruel words we know,  
In every battle kill our soldiers by the help they give the foe.

*Chorus:* Farewell, Mother, you may never – press me to your breast again;  
But, oh, you'll not forget me, Mother – if I'm numbered with the slain.

Hark! I hear the bugles sounding, 'tis the signal for the fight,  
Now, may God protect us, Mother, as He ever does the right.  
Hear "The Battle Cry of Freedom", how it swells upon the air,  
Oh, yes, we'll rally 'round the standard, or we'll nobly perish there.

*Chorus:* Farewell, Mother, you may never – press me to your breast again;  
But, oh, you'll not forget me, Mother – if I'm numbered with the slain.  
Fallen cold and dead.

*George F. Root*

---

This article was published in the Carlisle Historical Society Newsletter volume 2.1 of February 2009

[.pdf file](#)    [audio file](#)

To use this article in your newsletter or as a handout, click into the article; select all; copy; and paste into a MSWord file.

Please remember to [let us know](#) of this use so that we can let the author or other interested parties know.

Copyright © 2009  
northerncatskillshistory.com  
[contact@northerncatskillshistory.com](mailto:contact@northerncatskillshistory.com)  
March 21, 2010

