All Politics is Local: Hard Choices in the Canal Town of Peninsula, Ohio on the Eve of the Civil War Election of 1864

Introduction

George L. Waterman was the only surviving son of Lawson Waterman and his wife Angelina. The Waterman family owned and operated a significant farm along with the largest canal boat building yard in Peninsula, Ohio in 1861. Peninsula, located half way between Cleveland and Akron, Ohio along the Ohio and Erie Canal had boomed with the canal and had steadily grown in population and production up through president Lincoln’s election in 1860. Since 1858, George Waterman had been living in Cleveland, Ohio to attend a business college and had joined Cleveland’s military society/ militia- the Cleveland Greys. Shortly after Lincoln’s Inaugural in March, 1861, Confederate forces fired on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina on April 12th which launched the American Civil War. President Lincoln quickly called for 75,000 volunteers, and the Cleveland Greys just as quickly answered his call. Upon deployment, George Waterman wrote to his parents:

Cleveland, April 17th, 1861

Dear Father and Mother

I expect and know that this will be sad tidings to you but I must communicate it, which I do with tears in my eyes now for it; I hate to write it though. I belong to the Cleveland Greys and we are detailed to Washington and before you get this I shall be far on my journey. I knew how you would feel about it but I reasoned in this way- that you were not the only Parents and that if all listened to their friends there would not be any to go to fight for our National Flag. I think it my duty as an inhabitant of these United States to sustain the country. I have known of this sometime but have refrained from communicating it as I knew you would try to prevent my going. Dear parents, excuse my seeming ungratitude and want of love for I assure you it is only seeming. I think it my duty to pursue the course I have chosen and may God prosper the right. I will write again immediately upon my arrival at Washington. For the present Good Bye from your more than ever affectionate son.

G.L. Waterman

Father, I know your feelings but you are more able to stand up against them than is mother and I think in your mind my course is right. Comfort mother and be kind to her; she will be much more able to bear up against this if you help her. Again, I bid you good bye and remain your affectionate son,

George.

Then as now, Ohio was a political “Bell-weather” state to the extent that its vote usually reflected the nation as a whole. How went Ohio, so went the United States. Ohio voted for Lincoln in 1860, but was very divided- giving a large number of votes to the Northern Democratic candidate, Stephen Douglas. How it would vote in 1864 would depend on the course of the war- not just for the nation as a whole, but for Ohio in particular. Those citizens of Peninsula would likewise vote according to how the war affected their families and their fortunes- and their votes would further be informed by the social media of the day: letters and newspapers.

George Waterman carried on an extensive correspondence with his parents. After 3 months of service and seeing combat in the battle of First Bull Run, he returned home for a year before signing up again in 1862. Having led the recruiting drive in Boston Township, he was given an officer’s rank of Lieutenant and mustered into the 115th Ohio Volunteer Infantry along with 22 other “Boys from Boston” for the duration of the war. One of his recruits, Levi Boodey, rose through the ranks to become a sergeant in the unit, and also carried on an extensive correspondence with his
family. How will news of home affect soldiers in the field? How will news from the field impact family back home? How will the combination affect voting decisions in the Presidential Election in 1864?

**Image and quote source:** Robert P and Jeanette K Bishop - The 1858-1863 Letters of George Lawson Waterman, from School to War- Peninsula Historical Society, 1996

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**About This Lesson**

**A. General Citation**

This lesson is based on the National Register of Historic Places registration file, “Peninsula Village Historic District” (with photographs), Cuyahoga Valley National Park documents and images, and letters, documents, and images collected and published by the Peninsula, Ohio Library and Historical Society. The lesson was written by Paul Frankmann, an 8th grade Social Studies teacher at Harmon Middle School, in Aurora, Ohio during his summer 2017 Teacher-Ranger-Teacher experience. The project was supervised by CUVA National Park Ranger Heather Berenson and Conservancy for the Cuyahoga Valley Education Director Jesús Sánchez. Extensive support with archival research was provided by CUVA National Parks Rangers Rebecca Jones (Canal Exploration Center) and Melissa Arnold (Hawkins Library) along with Peninsula Library and Historical Society Director Randy Bergdorf.

**B. Where it fits into the Curriculum**

**Topics:** This lesson is firmly grounded in the politics and economics of the Civil War over the course of the years 1861-1864 and can be used to teach about every-day life on the home front as well as the war front and the connection between the two in what became, by 1864, a “total war”. Extensive work with primary source documents, images and maps supported by context notes, guiding questions, a vocabulary list, and a timeline will challenge students to think like historians, to infer, to compare and contrast, and to use evidence to justify their conclusions and their predictions.

While designed for 8th Grade Social Studies, the lesson could easily be adapted for 8th grade Language Arts, or enriched for high school U.S. History courses including AP U.S. History.

**Time-Period:** 19th Century (1861-1864)

**Curriculum Standards:**

**NCSS Thematic Strands:** 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10

**Ohio 8th Grade Social Studies New Learning Standards:** 1,10,11,13,14,15,16,17,19,21,22,23,23

**Common Core State Standards- ELA-Literacy:** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI. 8.1, 82. 8.3, 8.6, 8.8, 8.9, 8.10 and RH.6-8.7, 6-8.8, 6-8.9

**C. Objectives for Students**

1. To closely read excerpts from Civil War letters exchanged between soldiers and their families during the war
2. To identify personal politics and points of view on the war conveyed within letters exchanged during the war
3. To connect individual and local experiences with national events and to connect personal politics with positions advocated by political parties in their national platforms.
4. To describe a place in time, from documents, images, and maps provided about Peninsula, Ohio during the Civil War
5. To compare and contrast war time experiences of enlisted soldiers, officers, and civilians
6. To connect past experiences centered on Peninsula, Ohio with present experiences and issues in their own home town.

**D. Materials for Students**
Any combination of the following materials may be provided to students in print or online at the discretion of the teacher. The letter excerpts are numbered, and can easily be divided up or “chunked” to make them more manageable for students.

1. (3) Maps of the Ohio and Erie Canal, Boston Township in Summit County, Ohio, and Peninsula, Ohio in 1874 (See Locating the Site)

2. (2) Background Readings about Peninsula’s place on the Ohio and Erie Canal and wartime Politics in Peninsula (See Setting the State)

3. (2) Fact Sheets giving Vocabulary and a timeline of National Events 1861-64 (See Setting the Stage)

4. (2) Political Party Platforms- Democrat and Republican Platforms for 1864 (See Setting the Stage)

5. (2) Sets of Excerpts from the Letters of Lieutenant George L. Waterman and Sergeant Levi Barker Boodey, both in Company C. of the 115th Ohio Volunteer Infantry along with (2) Newspaper Articles from the Dayton Journal (Republican) describing the shooting and death of Lieutenant Waterman. (See Determining the Facts)

6. (10) Images showing the town of Peninsula, the Waterman and Boodey Families, their homes, and their places of business. (See Visual Evidence)

7. (3) Images dramatizing a 19th Century election and showing the Civil War Memorial and GAR Hall dedicated by Peninsula following the war (See Putting It All-Together)

E. Visiting the Site

Peninsula, Ohio is a living village that falls entirely within the Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CNVP). Its main street is an easily walkable National Historic District with a large number of buildings all dating to the Civil War and before including the Waterman and Boodey homes. An additional 22 properties in Peninsula- most connected to the canal including locks and an aqueduct are also on the National Register of Historic Places. The Peninsula Chamber of commerce in partnership with the Peninsula Library and Historical Society have developed an online walking tour app that covers the town. The Chamber also promotes a large number of festivals and events from spring through fall. The Ohio and Erie Canalway organization has a developed several “Quests” to promote exploration of the cultural and natural history of the town. Peninsula is centrally located in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park which maintains a downtown visitor’s center/store which, along with several craft shops and restaurants makes the town the jumping off point for exploration of the rest of the park. The Park has also restored the towpath trail along the canal and maintains remnants of the locks and aqueducts- all of which are interpreted with wayside signs and exhibits. A highly interactive Canal Exploration Center has been established at the north end of the park by the CNVP to present the story of the canal’s conception, construction, and impact locally and nationally and another interpretation center focusing on the Canal Boat Building industry in Peninsula and Boston is maintained by the CVNP in Boston. Bikes may be brought to or rented in Peninsula to use on the trail, and the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railway offers rides through the park- along with a bike and ride program and has its central stop/station in Peninsula.
Lesson Index to Student Materials and Activities

When War Hits Home: The Ohio and Erie Canal Town of Peninsula, and the Civil War Election of 1864

Getting Started - Image and Inquiry Question
Canal Boatyard and Mustill Store Images

Locating the Site - Maps
Ohio and Erie Canal
Boston Township
Peninsula, 1874

Setting the Stage - 3-4 Paragraphs Background (+ Additional Readings)
Canal from Cleveland to Akron
Peninsula Politics
Report of the Board of Public Works of the State of Ohio 1864
Democratic and Republican Platforms

Determining the Facts - 2-3 Readings
Waterman Letters + 2 Dayton Journal Articles
Boodey Letters
Civil War Timeline
Civil War Vocabulary

Visual Evidence - 3-6 Images
Peninsula Mainstreet and Birdseye views
Waterman Family, Home, Business, and Grave/ Memorial of Lieutenant George L. Waterman
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1864 Election Role Play (Including image of County Election painting)
Epilogue- Remembering the War and Honoring Those Who Served (Including link to images of Peninsula Civil War Soldiers Memorial and GAR Hall and the rest of the story)
War Letters
“Our Town” – Describing a Cultural Landscape
“Night Meeting” – Two Voice Poem prompt to connect 1864 and the present.
Getting Started: Inquiry Question

Below are pictures of a boat yard and a store as they would have appeared during the Civil War era. In the Ohio and Erie canal town of Peninsula, Ohio the Waterman family were owners of the largest of 4 boat yards. In Peninsula, Ohio the Boodey family were owners of one of 3 competing stores in town. During the Civil War, business boomed all along the canal while over 140 men from the town and surrounding township either volunteered or were drafted into the Union Army.

Ohio and Erie Canal Boatyard: Source- Cuyahoga Valley National Park Archives
Question: For those residents of Peninsula eligible to vote in the Presidential Election of 1864, What issues would be most important to their voting decision? What if they had a loved one in military service during the war?
Questions for Map 1

1. Trace the route of the Ohio and Erie Canal from Cleveland at Lake Erie to Portsmouth on the Ohio River. What major, modern cities are located along the canal route?
2. Trace the route of the Miami and Erie Canal from Toledo on Lake Erie to Cincinnati on the Ohio River. What major, modern cities are located along the Canal Route.

3. Find the following towns and villages which are mentioned in the letters of Lieutenant George Waterman and Sergeant Levi Barker Boodey: Peninsula, Cleveland, Akron, Massillon, Columbus, Cincinnati, Dayton, Hamilton

4. Looking at the map, what would be the most efficient way to ship goods from Cleveland to Toledo or from Portsmouth to Cincinnati?

5. What questions do you have?

The following maps showing Boston Township and Peninsula were published in the Combination Atlas Map of Summit County in 1874. As such, they show developments that followed the Civil War including the proposed route of the Valley Railway which followed the route of the Ohio and Erie Canal from Cleveland to Canton and opened in 1880. Otherwise most of the names and places and business remained as they were during the war.
Questions for Map 2 (It is highly recommended to use the online zoomable version of the map)

1. Trace the Route of the Ohio an Erie Canal through Boston Township. How many locks can you find?
2. Along the Canal Route, what canal related businesses are named or identified?
3. Find Boston Village and Peninsula Village. How could one best travel between them?
4. Find the dashed former riverbed just north of Peninsula that gave the village its name. (This was diverted by the Valley RR to save construction of two bridges along its route)

5. How do you suppose those families not living in the villages most likely made their living? Do you recognize any names? (These could be matched to the soldiers named in the letters or the list of those who served on the Civil War memorial in Peninsula)

6. What questions do you have?

**Map 3 Peninsula, 1874**

(Source: Peninsula Historical Society. A large scale, zoomable and searchable version of the map is available at SummitMemory.org in the 1874 Combination Atlas Map of Summit County. Direct Link: [Peninsula and Boston](https://www.summitmemory.org))

**Questions for Map 3** (It is highly recommended to use the online zoomable version of the map)

1. Find Mainstreet and the Mainstreet Bridge as it crosses both the Cuyahoga and the Ohio and Erie Canal

2. Find the Aqueduct over the Cuyahoga and lock that it leads into. (2 other Peninsula Locks are off the Map- one to the north, and one to the south.)

3. Find the Waterman property and a boat yard.

4. Find the Merrill Boodey homestead and store.

5. Find the Town Hall. What other public buildings can you find?

6. What other businesses can you find?

7. Based on their land holdings and/ or connections to named businesses, who seem to be the most influential members in the community?

8. What questions do you have?
Peninsula, Ohio developed as a canal town located midway between Cleveland and Akron on the northern section of the Ohio and Erie Canal. It was named after a peninsula like large finger of land enclosed within one of the ox-bow loops of the winding Cuyahoga River. Given travel time and the 3 locks and aqueduct that slowed canal traffic through the town, Peninsula often became an overnight stop and marketplace for the cargo boats and passenger packet boats traveling both north and south between Cleveland and Akron. Immigrants from Ireland, Germany, and England moved in via the canal and mixed with original settlers who had come from New England to what was then the Connecticut Western Reserve. All of the town’s residents took advantage of the town’s location on the canal and with an entrepreneurial spirit developed local resources to their full, economic potential. Residents of Peninsula farmed. They owned, operated and worked in quarries, saw mills, grist mills, blacksmith shops, and boat yards. They ran hotels and saloons and grocery and dry goods stores. Peninsula earned quite a reputation along the canal. “Approaching the Center of Town is the Main Street Bridge. It had the reputation of being the toughest spot in Ohio. A Saloon was located at each end of the Bridge. It took longer to cross the canal here than at any other point due to the drinking and fighting among the boatmen who had spent time in the saloons” (Source: Cuyahoga Valley National Park and Peninsula Historical Society, Images of America-Cuyahoga Valley, Arcadia Publishing, 2004). The canal connected Peninsula through Cleveland to markets throughout the Great Lakes and via the Erie Canal to New York City and the world. Beyond Akron, the canal connected Peninsula to markets in the South and West, via the Ohio and Mississippi rivers down to St. Louis, New Orleans, and beyond.

See “Locating the Site” for Maps of the Ohio and Erie Canal, Boston Township, and Peninsula. Also see “Visual Evidence” for images of Peninsula including the Main Street Bridge.

Optional Reading: Traveling from Cleveland to Akron on the Ohio and Erie Canal

Traffic on the canal peaked in the late 1850’s just before the start of the Civil War when railways began to carry all of the passengers, and a significant amount of cargo. Still, the canal competed by evolving to carry more bulk goods- coal, lumber, and grain in particular, to factories and power plants in the larger cities along the route. In 1861, the State of Ohio privatized the canals by leasing various sections to individual investors who were responsible for maintaining the canal while they, in exchange were able to profit from the collection of tolls. With the Civil War there was another boom in demand for products shipped on the canal- in particular for grains to supply rations for the Union Army. Ferdinand Schumacher’s Cascade Mills (later known as Quaker Oats) in North Akron won a huge Union Army contract to supply oatmeal, which made his fortune. His mills ground their grain with grindstones produced in Peninsula’s Deep Lock Quarry. Canal Boat building boomed as well- and now town produced more boats for the whole midwestern canal network during the Civil War years than did Peninsula in its 4 boat yards. Still, there were concerns about the future- both for the canal and the town for the post-war years.

Optional Reading: Report of the Board of Works of the State of Ohio 1864

Peninsula was the largest village in Boston Township and was home to the township hall (used as the polling place for elections) after being incorporated as a town in 1859. A town of hard working people, it was divided politically between Democrats and Republicans who had voted against each other in 1860 though Summit County and Ohio went for Lincoln. Whether Democrat or Republican, all residents were in support of maintaining the Union at the start of the war. However, on the subject of abolition, the town was at odds. Some in town had been actively involved with the Underground Railroad as the Cuyahoga Valley and Ohio and Erie Canal were major routes north to Cleveland which was a departure point via steamers for the promised land of Canada after 1850. More in town were afraid of what would result from the abolition of slavery- especially its impact on their wages and opportunities to continue making a good living. In the 1850’s and 60’s general stores were key gathering places for townspeople and those passing through and as such became centers for political debate. Over 140 township residents volunteered to serve in the Union Army- most after the 3rd call for volunteers in 1862 when George Waterman, the only child of the owner of the town’s largest boatyard actively recruited men from the township including Levi Barker Boodey who was the youngest brother of the
owner of one of the town’s most important stores. Most of those from Boston Township served in the 115th Ohio Volunteer Infantry regiment and they were well supported by aid societies organized by the ladies of the Township. Support for the war effort changed according to reports of successes and failures via newspaper accounts as well as from news from the front lines of the war sent home in letters from the “Boys from Boston” and that likely became common knowledge in town.

Optional Reading: Peninsula Politics

By 1864, the war had become costly in lives and treasures beyond anyone’s worst fears, and despite Union victories in the summer of 1864, no end to the war could be predicted. In Ohio, a former Congressman Clement Vallandingham ran for governor as a Democrat on a peace platform in 1863. At one point he was arrested for his anti-war speeches, convicted of treason, and exiled to the South. Riots ensued in his hometown of Dayton where martial law was declared and enforced by the 115th OVI along with detachments from a few other Union Army Units. A confrontation there with Southern sympathizers will cost Lt. George Waterman his life. By 1864, the former commander of the Union Army, George McClellan accepts the Democratic nomination for president to run on a peace platform against Republican nominee Abraham Lincoln who campaigns on a platform of prosecuting the war through to victory.

Required Reading: Democratic Party Platform 1864

Required Reading: Republican Party Platform 1864

By the time of the 1864 Presidential Election on November 8, 1864 the “Boys of Boston” in the 115th OVI have been deployed to the South, to Tennessee, and are beginning to see combat. For the first time in history, the Federal Government makes arrangements for soldiers in the Union Army and sailors in the Union Navy to vote. In Boston Township, voting takes place at the Town Hall in Peninsula.
Letters and Newspapers were the Social Media of the Civil War Era. Together, they kept people connected and informed.

People living through the Civil War, especially soldiers, knew that they were living through a turning point moment in history and that they were part of it. Accordingly, they wrote often and at length about big national events at the same time as they detailed their daily experiences and asked for specific details from home. Soldiers wrote to many different people in their extended families—parents, spouses, brothers and sisters, neighbors in addition to friends and sweethearts. Ladies Aid societies and school children organized letter writing campaigns to make sure that no soldier went unappreciated. Letters from home were a lifeline that was key to morale. Letters are all dated, and typically opening lines refer to the dates of the letters most recently received— or comment about not having heard anything in a long time. News shared varied widely according to the audience. Soldiers were hungry for all news from home— anything happening in town. Letters speak of everyday happenings, health issues, holiday gatherings, courtships, marriages, births, deaths, rumors, gossip, politics, reasons for serving and requests that specific things be sent. They not only tell of war front experience, but also bring their home town’s home front experience to life. All wished for the war to end, and all wished to come and be home. Many letters thus worked to lay the groundwork for coming home and picking up lives after military service. For Union Soldiers at least, the post office did a great job at speedily delivering letters from home—to soldiers in the field, addressed to them with their units, wherever their unit moved. As noted in several of the letters, Lieutenant Waterman and Sergeant Boodey often received letters within days.

Letters reflect national events and can be best understood in the context of a Civil War Timeline. One specific to these letters is provided.

See - Civil War Timeline

Much vocabulary is specific to Civil War Politics and/or military service. A glossary specific to the letters is provided.

See - Civil War Vocabulary

The letters themselves, while provided as excerpts are still lengthy. Excerpts are numbered and presented in chronological order. They need not be read in their entirety to gain a sense of the times and place. Also, both don’t need to be read. There is enough content for an entire class of students to divide and share. The introduction to each letter provides further context specific to the author. Questions are also provided for each.

See - Excerpts from the Civil War Letters of Lieutenant George L. Waterman (including a memorial statement from his fellow officers of the 115th Ohio Volunteer Infantry)

See - Excerpts from the Civil War Letters of Sergeant Levi Barker Boodey

Newspapers of the day were not objective, but rather advocated political opinions—leaning openly either Republican or Democrat. Not just editorials, but articles were written with a political spin. The two articles below covering the wounding and death of Lt. George Waterman are from the Republican leaning Dayton Journal. Newspapers are mentioned in the Waterman and Boodey letters, and were clearly mailed and shared with their families. Newspapers named in the letters are the Democratic Cincinnati Enquirer, and the independent Akron Beacon. Peninsula did not have its own local newspaper.

See - Another Democratic Outrage

See - Dead
Visual Evidence - Images

Images are presented by category following the links below. Context captions and questions are provided for each image on each page. Additional images are provided in “Putting it All Together”.

Peninsula Mainstreet and Birdseye views

Waterman Family, Home, Business, and Grave/ Memorial of Lieutenant George L. Waterman

Boodey Family, Home, and Business
Putting It All Together

The Civil War was a turning point in American History. It affected every city, town, and village in the country in revolutionary ways. The nation modernized and industrialized during the war. People moved and exercised influence in politics and in the workplace in new ways. While soldiers were off in military service, too many making the ultimate sacrifice, loved one left home had to endure. When soldiers came home- they, and their loved ones were changed, and life would never be the same again. It would be important to know, and show, that it had all been worth it.

Most wars are transformative in their impact on the nation, and on those directly involved. While no war has yet been so costly or so “total” in American history, the Civil War still offers lessons that are very relevant to the present, whether the nation is at peace, or at war. In learning and understanding how the Civil War impacted one small canal town in Ohio, students should be able to find connections that remind them of their own town in the past, present, and perhaps help them look forward to the future.

Activity 1 - 1864 Election Role Play (Including image of County Election painting)

The image above is a depiction of George Caleb Bingham’s 1852 Painting “The County Election”. In Ohio in the 1850's and 60’s, only adult white men could vote. African-American men were barred from voting, as were all women. Of those featured in the letters, only Lawson Waterman and Merrill Boodey would have been able to vote in Peninsula. Sergeant George Boodey would have been offered the opportunity to vote with his unit- great pains were taken for this for the first time ever, but it isn’t mentioned in the letters that are available. Debate was public and ballots weren’t all that secret as you can see by this image.

Take on the role of George or Merrill Boodey, or Lawson Waterman. Given the information about the war and the nation and Peninsula shared in the letters as well as examining the platforms offered by the Democratic and Republican parties for 1864 and decided how you would have voted. (You could also take on the role of Angelina Waterman or Martha Boodey and decide how you would advise your husband or brother in law to vote)

Discuss and debate with your classmates to recreate a scene resembling that in the picture. Then cast your ballot. Afterwards, journal in character about who you voted for- the Republican Lincoln, or the Democrat McClellan, and why. Lastly, journal as yourself about how you would have voted personally in 1864 (assuming you could vote) and why, and explain what you learned about the state of the nation as it impacted ordinary people in 1864. Do any of the issues or events or opinions seem similar to what is happening in America today?

Activity 5 expands on this role-play thinking.
Activity 2 - Epilogue - Remembering the War and Honoring Those Who Served (Including link to images of Peninsula Civil War Soldiers Memorial and GAR Hall and the rest of the story)

Following up on the spirit of the last paragraph of Lincoln’s 2nd Inaugural, “to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations”. What do you think could have been done locally, in Peninsula and Boston Township to help their Civil War veterans return to their families and to civilian life and be successful in living and making a living? How might their contributions and those of their families be recognized and remembered? Make a list of ideas.

How are military veterans and their families recognized, remembered, and helped in your home town? What helps veterans the most? Visit your local cemetery, war memorial, American Legion or Veterans of Foreign Wars post. Speak to a veteran that you know on any day- not just Veterans Day or Memorial Day.

Link to the Rest of the Story: Remembering and Honoring Those Who Served in the Civil War in Peninsula, Ohio

Activity 3 - War Letters

As noted in the Introduction to “Determining the Facts”. Letters were the Social Media of the day and a life-line connecting soldiers in the field to their families at home. Choose any one of the letters from Lieutenant Waterman or Sergeant Boodey and write back as yourself (given what you’ve learned of the times), or as the person who is addressed: Merrill or Martha Boodey or Lawson or Angelina Waterman.

See if you can find a way to write to a service man or woman from your home town- there are programs, by letter- or, online.

Watch the PBS American Experience documentary by the same name, “War Letters”, or find an anthology or collection of other letters from service men and women to and from their families online, at your local library or historical society.

Activity 4 - “Our Town” – Describing a Cultural Landscape

In the opening scene of Thornton Wilder’s famous play, “Our Town”, the stage manager brings the town of Grover’s Corner, New Hampshire to life by describing its geography from his vantage point in the upper town. He tells of churches and businesses and schools and the landscape. He names families and who lives where and remembers important events from the past and points out where they take place. Find a copy of the play and read the first act, or look up and find an audio dramatization or a video (both are available online). Can you picture Grover’s Corner from the description? Could you map it out?

Given the map and images of Peninsula, Ohio along with what you’ve learned of Peninsula from the letters and other readings in the lesson, how would you describe Peninsula following the model in “Our Town”?

How would you describe your own home town?

Activity 5 - “Night Meeting” – Two Voice Poem prompt to connect 1864 and the present

In his Martian Chronicles, Ray Bradbury imagines a meeting between a Human and a Martian one night in August 2002. Both are on their way to a party, but each in a different time frame. For the Human, only ruins of a past Martian civilization can be seen- all he sees are the lights of the settlement he is heading to. For the Martian, nothing Human is visible- just a great Martian city, very much alive with lights and sound. While they can talk to each other- which they do, and tell each other about their worlds, they cannot touch each other, or see what the other sees. Somehow caught at the juncture at one place between two different times, Past and Present or Future connect.

Imagine meeting one of the residents of Peninsula from 1864 on a visit to Peninsula today. What would you discuss? What would you ask about? How would your descriptions of Peninsula, Ohio, and the United States differ?
Create a dialogue in two voice poem format. (See Supplementary Resources for a Model)

Or, instead of connecting past and present, work from the letters to create two voice poem imagining a discussion between any two of the people featured in this lesson. Maybe imagine a discussion between the officer- Lieutenant Waterman and the soldier- Sergeant Boodey.
1864 Epilogue

Epilogue - The Rest of the Story

In the months that followed, C Company of the 115th OVI moved on to Lavergne, Tennessee where it was kept busy with scouting and foraging. Only 6 additional letters from Sergeant Boodey cover the months from June to November 1864 and none directly speak to the 1864 presidential election. Most of the content deals with news and comments about folks back home, and ideas about getting married to someone and settling down in Peninsula once the war is over. In December 1864 Sgt. Boodey is captured along with his company and detained in the infamous Confederate POW camp at Andersonville which he survived for 3 months until released. Returning home, he was aboard the Sultana steamer with over 2000 other paroled POW’s when it exploded on the Mississippi on April 25, 1865 killing almost 1200. Boodey survived that disaster, returned to Peninsula, married, and raised a family of 6 children before moving to Arlington Kansas with his family in 1877 where he passed away in 1904 at the age of 69 years old.

Abraham Lincoln won the election of 1864 and continued to pursue a course of action that would restore the Union and abolish slavery through Union victory in the War. His leadership assured passage of the 13th Amendment in the House of Representatives in January 1865 and sent the Amendment to the States for Ratification. In his Second Inaugural Address on March 4th, 1865 he blamed the war and it’s cost and length on Slavery, and ventured no prediction as to its final outcome. However, he dedicated the nation to winning the peace that would follow in his final paragraph.

"With malice toward none: with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations"

Richmond at last fell to Union Forces on April 3rd, 1865, and General Robert E. Lee surrendered his Army of Northern Virginia to General Ulysses S Grant’s Army of the Potomac on April 9th, effectively ending Southern resistance. President Lincoln was assassinated on April 14th and the task of reconstructing the nation fell to president Andrew Johnson and then to Congress.

On May 30th, 1868 the practice of decorating the graves of fallen soldiers was formalized as Decoration Day- later to become the federal holiday of Memorial Day.

In 1888, a former school house on Main Street was remodeled to serve as the meeting place for the members of the local chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic- a fraternal organization for veterans of the Civil War and a precursor to today’s American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars veteran groups. The GAR chapter was named for Lieutenant George L. Waterman.

On July 4, 1889, Colonel Arthur L. Conger from Peninsula who served in the 115th OVI and was mentioned in both the Waterman and Boodey letters along with his wife, Emily Bronson, from one of the founding families of Peninsula- presented a significant Civil War Memorial to the town. The Memorial was initially located at the intersection of Main Street and Riverview Road next to the GAR Hall, and its dedication was a grand, public celebration. Listing the names of the 141 Boston Boys who served in the Civil War along with their 4 most important military engagements, it has since been moved to Peninsula’s Cedar Grove Cemetery.
July 4, 1889 Dedication of the Peninsula Civil War Soldier’s Memorial

Source: Peninsula Library and Historical Society
Peninsula Civil War Soldiers Memorial in Cedar Grove Cemetery

Source of all of the following images: Paul Frankmann
FIVE FORKS

PRESENTED TO
BOSTON Tp
BY
ARTHUR LATHAM
AND
EMILY BRONSON
CONGER
TO COMMEMORATE THE BRAVERY
AND PATRIOTISM OF THE SOLDIERS WHO
SERVED IN THE WAR OF THE REBELLION
1861–1865
ERECTED JULY 4TH 1889