

'An inordinate amount': History talk celebrates Alburgh, Isle La Motte commitment to Civil War

By MICHAEL FRETT
Islander Staff Writer

ALBURGH — Late this past Saturday morning at the Alburgh Public Library, Andrew Whipple read a brief list of names familiar to those with a passing knowledge of Alburgh and Isle La Motte history.



Andrew Whipple from the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War and Isle La Motte Historical Society presents during this weekend's Civil War event at the Alburgh Public Library. Photo by Michael Frett.



Alburgh's Connie Boutin shares a tintype photograph of her grandmother's uncles, both American Civil War veterans, in their uniforms.

Photo by Michael Frett.

Babcock, he read. Sowles. Campbell. Mott. Fisk. Those names were among the more than 200 men from Alburgh and Isle La Motte to serve in the American Civil War. Some would return — and some would not.

"We want to keep the memory alive of men — and sometimes women — who contributed to the civil war to reunify the country and eradicate the scourge of slavery," Whipple later told *The Islander* after the presentation at the Alburgh library. "Vermont gave an inordinate amount."

Whipple, the president of Isle La Motte's historical society and commander for the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War's Stannard Camp, led Saturday's event at the Alburgh library, presenting a brief history on Grand Isle County's two

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northernmost towns' contributions to the U.S.'s bloodiest war.

Through the course of the American Civil War, 136 residents from Alburgh and 73 residents from Isle La Motte would ultimately serve. Citing research from celebrated Vermont historian Howard Coffin and the Champlain Islands' own Allen Stratton, Whipple noted some of the veterans from the two towns who served, including a number of locals who died fighting in the Southern U.S.



The Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War's Brian Frazier speaks during this weekend's presentation on the American Civil War in Alburgh.

Photo by Michael Frett.

There was Maj. George David Sowles, an officer who trained soldiers in Alburgh and was wounded during the Battle of Cold Harbor. There was Sgt. Thomas Babcock, another Alburgh native captured while fighting in Virginia who died in one of the Confederate States of America's more notorious prison camps, and the 19-year-old William Babcock who did return to Alburgh.

There were the Fisk siblings from Isle La Motte, three of whom died. There was also Melvin Hyde, a wartime surgeon from the Champlain Islands' smallest town who came back to Isle La Motte after the fighting to continue practicing medicine in his hometown.



During a recent American Civil War presentation in Alburgh, the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War's Martin Fleming displays a musket carried by his great-grandfather. Photo by Michael Frett.

Whipple was joined by other members of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War's Stannard Camp, a Milton-headquartered branch of the fraternal organization formed for descendants of soldiers who fought for the Union Army during the American Civil War. Members and Alburgh locals alike presented both personal artifacts dating back to the war and accessories used for battle-field reenactments.

Alburgh's Connie Boutin passed around a tintype photograph of her grandmother's uncles, both American Civil War veterans, in their uniforms. The Stannard Camp's Martin Fleming displayed the musket his great-grandfather carried during the war. Milton's Bill Orr, in a reenactor's uniform, brought attendees

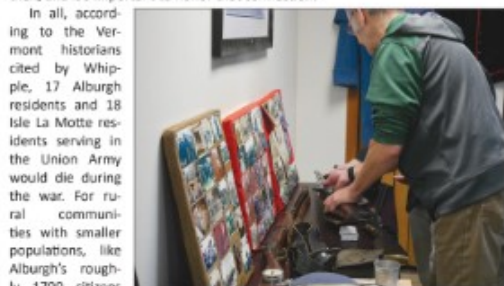


Flanked by presenter Andrew Whipple, Martin Fleming shares a cup his great-grandfather, an American Civil War veteran, received at the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg. Courtesy photo.

outdoors to fire blank rounds from a reproduction musket in the Alburgh library's yard.

For Jennifer Theoret, the president of the Alburgh Historical Society and a co-sponsor for Saturday's event, it was important that Alburgh's historians help celebrate the town's contributions to history.

"I think we need to keep in mind where we come from and the sacrifices people made before us," Theoret told *The Islander* as Saturday's event came to a close. "There's an unbroken line between people living now and people living then, and it's important to honor that connection."



The Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War's Martin Fleming handles a reproduction rifle displayed during a recent Civil War presentation at the Alburgh Public Library. Photo by Michael Frett.

according to Whipple, and were worth mentioning more than a century later.

"It's hard to imagine how profoundly this country was impacted by this war," Whipple said, "and it's hard to imagine how Vermont was impacted by this war."

According to the Vermont Historical Society, more than 34,000 Vermonters or around 10% of the state's population would serve throughout the American Civil War, fighting during several of the war's most decisive battles. More than 5,200 soldiers from Vermont would die from combat, disease or accidents during the war, according to the state's historical society.

According to Whipple, the Stannard Camp hoped to be available for similar presentations focused on other towns interested in celebrating their local ties to the American Civil War. Through that work, Whipple told *The Islander* he hoped to help champion the commitment of Vermont's own to preserving the U.S. and "the notion of men and women being free."

"We feel it's exceedingly important to keep their memory alive," Whipple said. "It's powerful to me."



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