

## Introduction to the Researchers, the Project, and the Mexican-American War

This project was curated by Rachel Crane and Izzy Klonsky, both students of West Springfield High. Izzy is a competitive swimmer who likes learning about underrepresented historical figures, and Rachel enjoys playing video games and hopes to become an engineer. This research opportunity was available to us through our Applied History class, which allows upperclassmen to explore what historians do to preserve history. For the first semester or so, students are in the classroom learning about genealogy, Fairfax County, and are given small projects ranging from book reports to creating posters. In addition to those activities, there are field trips and historians that come to discuss their careers. While it is a fun class, the second semester is where students must focus on attaining 80 volunteer hours through their internship. We were very lucky to be placed together to work on this project, and even luckier to be working with Mrs. Mary Lipsey. We have come a long way with our research and want to first say our thanks to Mrs. Lipsey, our amazing advisor, and Mr. Brian Heintz, our Applied History teacher. Another person we would like to mention is William Page Johnson II, the author of *Off to War*, which was our main source material for this project. Through his work and many others, we put together information about soldiers

To give some context about the months leading up to the war, Mexico had recently gained independence in the 1820s and the government wanted to bring more people into the uninhabited land of Texas; this decision to allow Americans into present-day Texas happened for a multitude of reasons, but the main one being that Mexico felt threatened by the indigenous population living in Texas, and felt that American settlers could curb that threat. However, the number of American immigrants surpassed the local Mexican population in Texas, which worried Mexican officials. After settling into the land, the practice of slavery was brought to Texas via Americans, even though slavery was banned in Mexico. Ultimately Mexican officials did little to stop the American population from growing in Texas and also did not stop Americans from owning slaves.

It is also worth mentioning how the idea of Manifest Destiny played a role in the events that would lead up to the Mexican War. In the 1830's, there were many revolts led by Americans because they believed they lacked representation in Mexico City. In response to these revolts, Mexican General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna declared himself dictator in 1835, but his dictatorship did not last long as the Texas defenders crushed the Mexican army on April 21st, 1836 in the Battle of San Jacinto. Texans captured Santa Anna and forced him to sign a treaty making the Republic of Texas a reality.

The issue of annexation became a hot topic in American politics at the time, and it wasn't until James K. Polk was elected president when the annexation of Texas came to fruition. Controversy began when Mexico would not recognize Texas as an annexed state. In addition to this

controversy, Polk offered Mexico a measly \$25 million dollars for the land of California and New Mexico, which Mexico would not accept. After the offer was rejected, Polk decided to send troops to defend Texas from an invasion from the Mexicans. In response to this, Mexico sent troops of their own to attack American troops. Polk then claimed that American blood was lost on American soil, and using this reasoning, he asked for a declaration of war from Congress. Congress approved Polk's request for war on May 13th, 1846.

A proclamation was issued by Virginia Governor William Smith on May 23rd, 1846, searching for volunteer soldiers. Recruitment was successful, specifically in Alexandria. About 10 months after the initial recruitment period in Virginia, Captain Henry Fairfax organized the 13th Company, which is also referred to as Company L, from Northern Virginia on March 1st, 1847. On March 17th, the company crossed the Potomac River from Virginia via a steam boat, *Phoenix*, and waited to be transported to Mexico from Fort Washington, Maryland. On April 1st, the company backtracked and crossed the Potomac River once again. After reaching Washington D.C. via the Potomac River, the men took a train to Relay House, Maryland, and then took another train the next morning to go to Cumberland, Maryland. Numerous times in this document, men from Company L are identified as having enlisted at a later date than March 1st from various places other than Virginia; from this information, it is assumed that many men joined Company L during their journey to Mexico. By April 3rd, the company took off from Cumberland by "road wagons" to Brownsville, Pennsylvania and the Ohio River. Once they reached the Ohio River, the men traveled by boat south into the Mississippi River down to New Orleans, Louisiana, where they then set sail on a different boat to Point Isabel, Texas. They arrived there on April 28th, then left to join Major Early and all of the other Virginia companies in Monterrey, where they finally arrived on May 21st. Around June, the 13th company joined with other regiments in Buena Vista. Most Virginia companies stayed around Buena Vista and Saltillo throughout the duration of the war.

Once in Mexico, many of the Virginia companies were bored and sick, and this is where many offenses and court-martials were seen on muster rolls. Specifically, the most common offenses during this time were Neglect of Duty, Disobedience of Orders, Sleeping on Post, Absence Without Leave, and Desertion. The punishments for these offenses ranged from forfeiting a month's pay, confinement in the provost guardhouse, or even doing hard labor with a ball and chain attached to the leg (Johnson 27). The illnesses that affected many Virginia companies included "measles, smallpox, typhoid, and malaria" (Johnson 28).

By February 2nd, 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo was signed, effectively ending the war. However, it was not until June 9th of that year that the news made it to Virginia. For this occasion, Colonel Hamtramck celebrated by ordering an artillery salute to take place that afternoon. In July 1848, the Virginia soldiers finally began their journey back home, being transported via boat to Fort Monroe, Virginia, where they were met with parties and celebrations.

The chart below includes details about each soldier from the list provided in *Off to War* of people who served in Company L, 1st Virginia Volunteer Infantry. Some names were omitted, and those names were of those who were discharged or deserted during the war. These names were omitted because very little information could be found on them beyond the information provided in *Off to War*, and any routes of collecting more information about these soldiers would be unverifiable given that no pre- or post-war information was given on them. To honor their efforts and lives, however, their names are as follows: **James H. Clemments (Private), William W. Corrie (Private), James Dean (Private), Henry Eaton (Private), John Hull (Private), Charles Kennedy (Private), James Steward (Private), Richard Bryant (Corporal), William Allen (Private), and James Gardner (Private)**. The rest of those we were able to research were included in this table, which includes the soldier's rank, date of enlistment, place of enlistment, age of enlistment, date of birth, and date of death. N.D. in the Date of Death column indicates a lack of recorded death date. All information in this chart, minus date of death, were found using *Off to War*. Most dates of death were found using Findagrave, though numerous others are from *Off to War*.

Name	Rank	Date of Enlistment	Place of Enlistment	Age of Enlistment	DOB	DOD (N.D.= no recorded death date)
James Thrift	Captain	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	30	1817	06/02/1862
James H. Dulaney	1st Lt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	28	1819	1858
Upton H. Herbert	2nd Lt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	26	1820	04/17/1906
Thomas Moore	2nd Lt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	27	07/08/1819	06/17/1899
Charles Bishop	1st Sgt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	25	1822	N.D.
James F. Waldon	2nd Sgt.	03/03/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	43	1804	N.D.
Benjamin F. Thrift	3rd Sgt.	03/22/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	20	04/25/1827	04/04/1904
Abdon Lee Burke	4th Sgt.	03/02/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	22	11/19/1824	06/09/1914
Augustus Davis	1st Cpl.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	19	02/13/1825	02/18/1890
George W. White	2nd Cpl.	04/04/1847	Cumberland, MD	20	1827	N.D.

John L. Moore	3rd Cpl.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	20	1827	07/11/1879
James Day	4th Cpl.	03/16/1847	Alexandria, VA	22	1825	N.D. (possibly 04/12/1903)
<b>Privates who survived post-war</b>						
John Ballenger	Pvt.	03/10/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	28	1822	04/20/1903
Andrew Brown	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	19	11/20/1847	11/01/1904
Samuel Brown	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	19	1828	N.D.
Winfield S. Bruce	Pvt.	04/02/1847	Harper's Ferry	23	04/03/1824	03/11/1912
John Byrnes	Pvt.	03/15/1847	Alexandria, VA	33	1814	Likely 10/01/1907
James Churchill	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	29	1818	N.D.
William T. Dantt	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	19	1828	01/25/1873
John Thomas Day	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	20	05/21/1828	07/20/1893
Robert Dyer	Pvt.	03/15/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	23	02/22/1827	05/10/1895 (grave) 12/23/1890 (Off to War)
Joel R. Dykes	Pvt.	04/03/1847	Cumberland, MD	20	1824	01/03/1888
Henry Evans	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	31	1811	N.D.
John Evans	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	24	1823	11/20/1891
Patrick Gately	Pvt.	03/15/1847	Alexandria, VA	32	1815	N.D.

James E. Givens	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	30	12/11/1816	Likely 4/30/1862
James Griffith	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	38	1809	04/22/1882
John R. Gunnell	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	22	08/23/1825	05/20/1906
William Hagan	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	28	1820	N.D.
Charles F. Haines	Pvt.	03/02/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	25	11/23/1825	07/20/1887
Edward L. Hamilton	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	35	1812	N.D.
William H. Jenkins	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	23	1824	Likely 06/14/1891
George Kerr	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	24	1823	Likely 07/07/1893
Caleb Kitchen	Pvt.	03/15/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	18	11/11/1829	04/01/1888
Abner J. Lakeman	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	21	10/19/1826	01/13/1892
Opie Lindsay	Pvt.	03/16/1847	Alexandria, VA	22	12/08/1825	07/19/1899
James J. Mansell	Pvt.	04/05/1847	Brownsville, PA	19	1828	Likely 12/28/1901
John A. McDonald	Pvt.	04/02/1847	Rely House, VA	19	1828	N.D.
James R. Millan	Pvt.	03/18/1847	Ft. Washington, MD	30	1816	N.D.
Armistead S. Mills	Pvt.	03/15/1847	Alexandria, VA	25	1822	07/23/1892
Henry Mills	Pvt.	03/15/1847	Alexandria, VA	29	1818	05/xx/1880
Dagobert B. O'Bannon	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	19	05/21/1822	03/11/1898

Charles Patterson	Pvt.	03/26/1847	Ft. Washington, MD	34	1813	N.D.
Thomas Ratcliffe	Pvt.	03/24/1847	Ft. Washington, MD	19	1828	01/21/1899
George F. Richards	Pvt.	08/23/1823	Fairfax Courthouse	22	08/23/1823	06/05/1904
Henry C. Richards	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	19	1828	N.D.
John R. Richards	Pvt.	04/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	27	1819	07/04/1864
William Robey	Pvt.	03/16/1847	Alexandria, VA	22	05/23/1825	04/18/1881
Samuel Sheckles	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	19	1828	05/14/1900
Abijah B. Smith	Pvt.	03/30/1847	Ft. Washington, MD	20	1827	N.D.
James L. Smith	Pvt.	04/03/1847	Cumberland, MD	20	1827	Likely 05/01/1872
Ebenezer E. Stark	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	38	1828	N.D.
John Waugh	Pvt.	03/08/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	26	1821	08/22/1893
Frances S. Wilson	Pvt.	03/31/1847	Ft. Washington, MD	42	1805	N.D.
Charles B. Wren	Pvt.	03/16/1847	Alexandria, VA	28	03/25/1818	N.D.
John T. Wright	Pvt.	03/16/1847	Alexandria, VA	32	1815	N.D.
<b>Soldiers who were discharged (not the complete list--only those we could</b>						

reasonably research)						
Richard Young	2nd Lt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	29	1818/1817	07/09/1850
John B.F. Barnard	Pvt.	N.D.	Unknown	Unknown	1821	12/21/1875
John A. Bennett	Pvt.	03/18/1847	Fort Washington	34	1813	N.D.
Thomas Berry	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	16	1831	Likely 06/11/1879
James J. Conroy	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	19	1828	Two possible dates (explained in document)
Jacob Q. Creamer	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	43	1804	Two Possible dates (explained in document)
James C. Deneal	Pvt.	N.D.	Unknown	Unknown	10/05/1825	03/24/1906
Richard Maury Augustus Fenwick	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	21	03/23/1826	04/10/1907 or 03/10/1907
William Kelly	Pvt.	03/16/1847	Alexandria, VA	30	1817	N.D.
George M. McCoy	Pvt.	03/02/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	24	1823	N.D.
Joseph Tuttle	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	24	1823	N.D.
James West	Pvt.	03/15/1847	Alexandria, VA	19	11/02/1827	12/30/1898
James Newall	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	19	1828	N.D.
Soldiers who died in war						
Henry Fairfax	Capt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	42	05/04/1804	08/16/1847

Mahlon Mills	Pvt.	03/15/1847	Alexandria, VA	23	1824	N.D.
Robert Mills	Pvt.	03/18/1847	Ft. Washington, MD	23	1824	N.D.
Samuel Trott	Pvt.	03/15/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	20	1827	08/17/1847
Charles West	Pvt.	03/01/1847	Fairfax Courthouse	32	1815	08/06/1847

In the documents detailing soldier information, the page number next to each name refers to the corresponding pages about these people featured in *Off to War*. For example, next to John Ballenger's name is "pg. 66," which means that his information can be found on page 66 of *Off to War*.

In those documents, when a Bounty Land Warrant is mentioned, it refers to a reward in the form of 160 acres of land for having served in the war. These grants were from the federal government, and could be redeemed by any Mexican American War veteran who had been honorably discharged (i.e. served until the end of the war) for their efforts. A veteran could also redeem the Bounty Land Warrant in the form of a certificate, which amounted to about \$100 at that time. However, as noted by the Descendants of Mexican War Veterans website, greedy land spectators often told veterans that the certificate they redeemed from the warrant was worth less than the guaranteed \$100, so it was not uncommon for veterans to receive much less than their promised compensation.



## Works Cited

*Off to War* by William Page Johnson II. Published in 2002.

**Findagrave** <https://www.findagrave.com/>

**Ancestry Classroom** <https://ancestryclassroom.com/> (this resource is only accessible through a school, but it is the free version of Ancestry.com)

**Chronicling America** <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/> (specific page and volume numbers along with date of publication are included on the pages in which a newspaper was used)

**FamilySearch** <https://www.familysearch.org/en/united-states/> (specific family trees and records are cited on the page of that particular soldier)

**Virginia Chronicle** <https://viriniachronicle.com/>

**Virginia Chronicle, Alexandria Gazette**

<https://viriniachronicle.com/?a=q&hs=1&r=1&results=1&txf=txIN&txq=Alexandria+Gazette&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-----> (specific page and volume numbers along with date of publication are included on the pages in which a newspaper was used)

**The Descendants of Mexican War Veterans**, website,

<https://www.dmwv.org/research.php#:~:text=Immediately%20upon%20discharge%2C%20Mexican%20War,redeemable%20for%20%24100%20in%20scrip>.