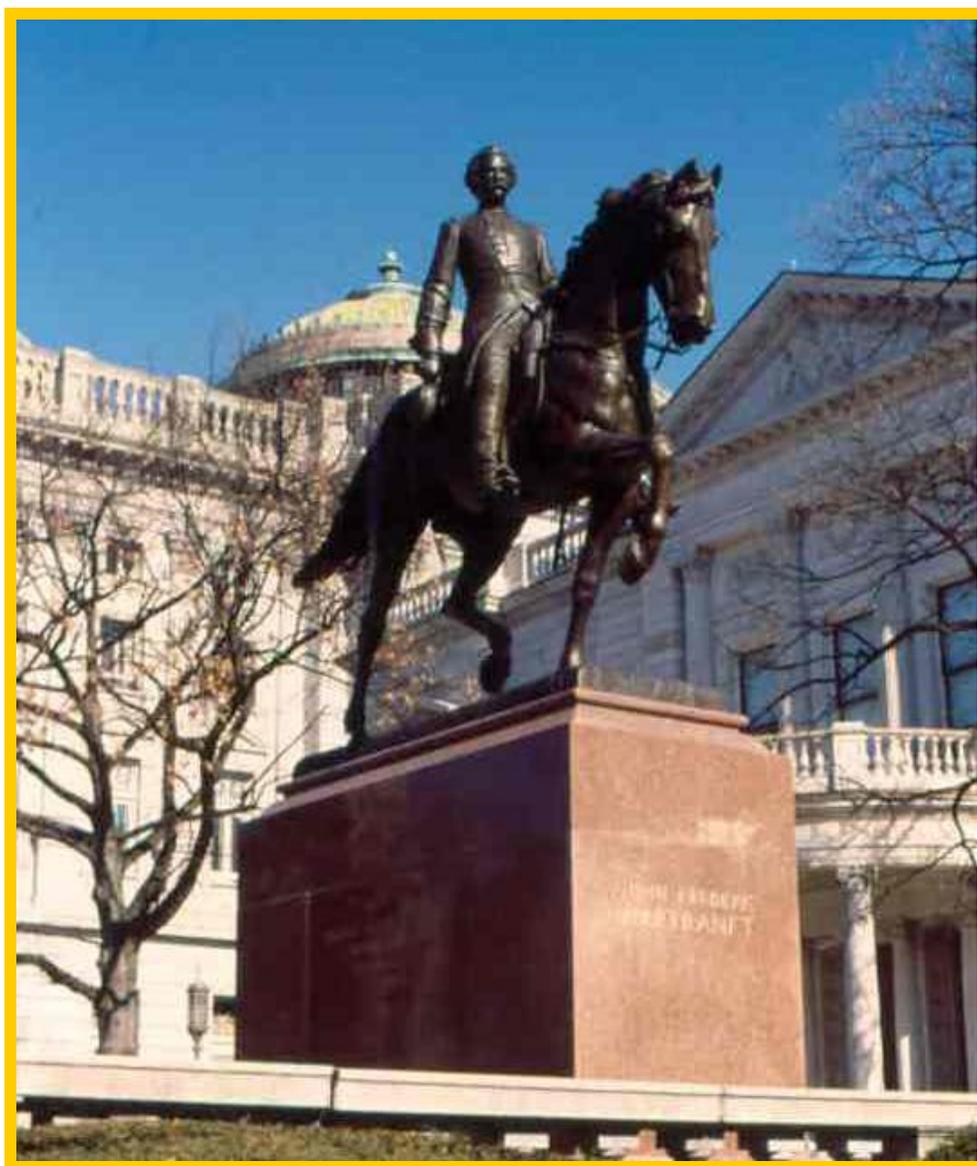


The Bugle



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John Frederick Hartranft

Brevet Major General, U.S.V.
Governor of Pennsylvania

General and Governor: John Frederick Hartranft

By A. M. Gambone

Regrettably, the name of John Frederick Hartranft has lost its luster for many of the residents of the Keystone State. In fact, many do not even know who he was or what he accomplished. Yet, during the American Civil War, and the years following, the Hartranft name was highly regarded by many in the state and nation.

Born December 16, 1830, John was the only child of Samuel E. and Lydia Bucher Hartranft. Raised in the rural area of Fagelysville, Pennsylvania, (near Pottstown, Montgomery County)), his family moved to burgeoning Norristown in March 1844, where John attended the Treemont Seminary. His business aggressive father and attentive mother made certain that their son would receive a good education. John attended Marshall College at Mercersburg, Pennsylvania, for one semester. For reasons unknown, he then went off to Union College in Schenectady, New York, and studied to be an engineer. Graduating in 1853, he returned to Norristown, worked for some railroads as a rodman, a position related to surveying. On January 26, 1854, he married pretty Sallie Sebring, who was destined to give birth to their seven children. John became a member of the Democratic Party and began to study law and was admitted to the Montgomery County Bar in 1860.

During the years prior to the Civil War, young Hartranft was very busy as a lawyer, deputy sheriff, stock broker, member of the Borough Council, real estate investor, President of the Montgomery Hose and Steam Fire Engine Company, and active with the Montgomery County Agricultural and Mechanical Society, and the Committee to Improve Roads, Streets and Bridges. At the same time, he became involved with the local and state militia, and was elected lieutenant-colonel. He also became a member of the Masonic Lodge No. 190 in Norristown. In 1858, John was only twenty-eight years old and two things remain vital to the understanding of his memory. First, he was a product of the passive Schwenkfelder Church. Second, he sprang from the community known as "Pennsylvania Dutch."

When Civil War broke out, Hartranft, a citizen-soldier, promptly went to Harrisburg and offered his services, along with his 600-man regiment, to



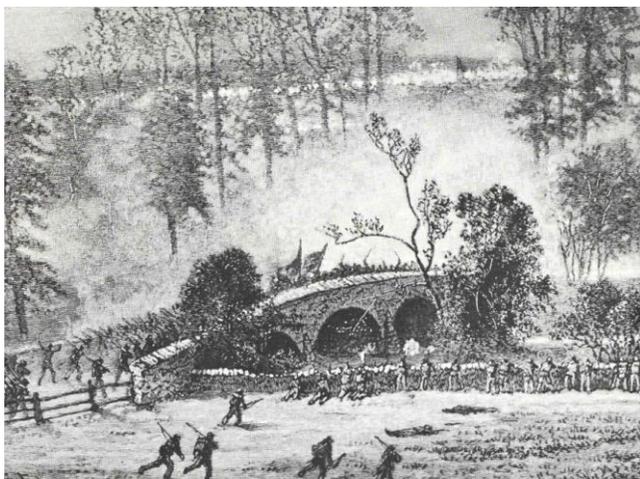
Governor Andrew G. Curtin. They were gladly accepted, and on April 20, 1861, the unit was inducted for a period of 90-days. Their first stop was Camp Curtin in Harrisburg where they would be officially designated as the 4th Pennsylvania Volunteers.

The regiment then moved off to Baltimore and Washington, D.C., and prepared for the first (and everyone thought, the only) battle of the war. Surprisingly, on July 20, Hartranft was approached by some members of the regiment who informed him that the men of the regiment had decided to return home, because their 90-day enlistment was now complete. Despite any pleas that he and General Irvin McDowell, army commander, offered about an imminent battle, those men would not change their minds and simply left the field. So, on the day of the First Battle of Bull Run (Manassas), an embarrassed Hartranft attached himself to the brigade of Colonel William B. Franklin, where he brought order to chaos when the great skedaddle began. For his heroic efforts, Hartranft was awarded the Medal of Honor 25 years later in 1886. Other men from the 4th who also remained on the field were Captain Walter H. Cook, who received the Medal of Honor in 1887, Sergeant-Major Jones C. Iredell, and Privates Joseph C. Reed and Thomas Simpson. Some of the men who walked off that field would subsequently garner military

acclaim, including General John Rutter Brooke, Colonel William J. Bolton, Major Edwin Schall [killed in 1864 at Cold Harbor] and Captain William Allebaugh, who was first over the bridge at Antietam.

By September 1861, Hartranft had raised a new regiment comprised of many of those recalcitrant men from the old 4th Regiment. Additional members were also recruited throughout eastern Pennsylvania. Dubbed the 51st Pennsylvania Volunteers, that regiment would fight solely under the Ninth Corps flag, in both theaters, and bury their dead from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean to the banks of the Mississippi River.

The 51st and Colonel Hartranft first fought in the early 1862 Battle of Roanoke Island, while General George B. McClellan was preparing for his Peninsula Campaign. During that time, Sallie pleaded with John to come home because two of his children were seriously ill. Unable to tear himself away until the fight was over, Hartranft finally returned home on March 24, 1862 only to find that his children, Ada and Wilson, were dead and already buried. Returning to his command, he and the 51st fought next at the Battles of Second Bull Run, Chantilly, South Mountain and Antietam. It was in the sleepy little Maryland village of Sharpsburg where General Lee's first invasion of the North came to a head along Antietam Creek. Hartranft and the 51st Pennsylvania, in concert with the 51st New York, stormed across the stone bridge that today bears the name of their corps commander, Ambrose Burnside.



Charge over Burnside's Bridge at Antietam

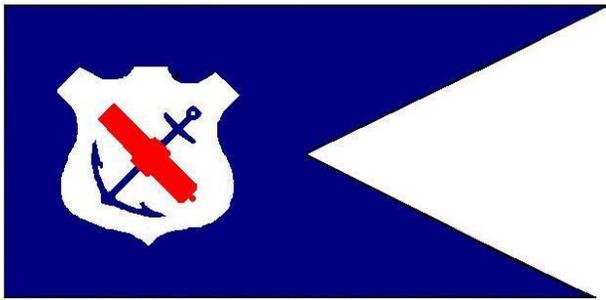
In December 1862, the 51st then took part in the bloody assault against Marye's Heights in Fredericksburg, Virginia, where their ranks were depleted by 90 men. After Fredericksburg, the Ninth

Corps was sent to Vicksburg in the western theater to protect the rear of General Ulysses Grant's line from Confederate assault. As a result, when Hartranft's hometown of Norristown was in potential danger from Lee at Gettysburg in July 1863, he and the 51st were about 1,000 miles away in Mississippi. On July 16, those Pennsylvanians were first to enter the State Capital of Jackson, Mississippi, and they joined in the "sacking" of the town. Then, on November 16, 1863, at a small crossroads known as Campbell's Station (Tennessee), Hartranft temporarily led the Second Division of Burnside's Ninth Corps, and defeated the Confederate Division of General Lafayette McLaws. That victory gave Burnside ample time to direct his entry into Knoxville. Once inside that city, Hartranft, an engineer, ordered a dam constructed, which caused wide-spread flooding that thwarted any designs of attack by Confederate General James Longstreet. Sent back East, Hartranft and his men served again under General Grant and fought in the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor and the Siege of Petersburg. During that Spotsylvania Campaign, Hartranft was promoted to brigadier-general on May 14, 1864, and commanded the First Brigade, Third Division, Ninth Corps.

On July 30, 1864, after the great mine explosion at Petersburg, General Hartranft led most of his First Brigade into the left side of the crater. After 9 1/2 hours of horrid fighting, "Black John" [a sobriquet because of the color of his mustache and hair] led his exhausted men to safety. That sad episode was followed by the fights at Yellow Tavern, where Confederate General J.E.B. Stuart was mortally wounded, and Weldon Station. During the month of December 1864, Hartranft was given the Ninth Corps' new Third Division, composed of six raw Pennsylvania regiments. That assignment dictated that he relinquish his connections with the 51st Pennsylvania.

During the very early hours of March 25, 1865, the Confederate forces led by Confederate General John Brown Gordon made a desperate attempt to punch through Grant's line west of Petersburg. This was the Battle of Fort Stedman! When daylight came and Hartranft became aware of the assault, he led his green division toward the earthen fort. Forming his men like a swinging barn-door, he headed a successful counter attack and drove the Rebels into an area known as the "no-man's land." In the process, Gordon lost approximately 5,000 casualties, many captured. This became General Lee's last offensive. Hartranft's quick and decisive action that day won

him a rare on-the-spot promotion from General Grant to the rank of brevet major-general.



Ninth Army Corps headquarters flag was blue, with a white shield, red cannon barrel and blue anchor. The anchor commemorated its early operations along the Atlantic coast with the navy.

The victory at Fort Stedman, along with the battle of Five Forks led to General Lee's evacuation of Richmond and ultimate surrender at Appomattox. The war soon came to an end as the other Confederate armies surrendered but the joy was tempered by the assassination of President Lincoln. The new President, Andrew Johnson, reached out and appointed Hartranft Provost Marshal General in command of Old Capital Prison and all those charged in the Lincoln conspiracy trial. During that time, Hartranft worked closely with his hometown friend, Major-General Winfield Scott Hancock, who had been appointed Military Governor of Washington, D.C. In the end, Hartranft would hang Lewis Paine, David Herald, George Atzerodt and the first woman ever put to death by the Federal Government, Mary Surratt.

When the Lincoln Conspiracy trial was over, Hancock offered Hartranft a full colonelcy if he would remain in the regular army. However, his wife, Sallie wanted him home, so he refused the offer. But, Hartranft did not remain long in Norristown, for he soon became Auditor General of Pennsylvania. Now a Republican, he won both laudable commentaries and stinging accusations. In 1872, he ran for Governor and was inaugurated on January 21, 1873, at the age of 42. During his two terms in office, Pennsylvania adopted a new constitution, reorganized the state's National Guard, extended voting rights to African-Americans, supported some labor reforms but put down a violent railroad strike and the infamous "Mollie Maguires." He also had the honor of hosting the nation's centennial celebration in Philadelphia in 1876.

As a private citizen once again, Hartranft was active in many areas including Postmaster of Philadelphia, Junior Vice-Commander of the Loyal Legion of the United States, Major-General of the Pennsylvania

National Guard for life, Collector of the Port of Philadelphia, Manager of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, National Commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the State Hospital for the Insane at Norristown, a member of the Cherokee Indian Commission, President of the Board of Trustees for the University of Pennsylvania, and a Trustee of the Pennsylvania Military Academy at Chester.

Hartranft was president of three firms: Lynchburg Manufacturing and Mining Company; The Commercial Mutual Accident Insurance Company, and the Pennsylvania Boiler Insurance Company. He was also an active member of the Norristown Board of Trade. In 1889, Hartranft was asked by President Benjamin Harrison to serve as the Commissioner of Pensions, but owing to his failing health, he declined the appointment.

Suffering from a kidney ailment, John Frederick Hartranft died in Norristown on October 17, 1889, at the age of 58. He was laid to rest in Montgomery Cemetery, which already held Norristown's other four Civil War general-heroes, Winfield Scott Hancock, Matthew R. McClennan, Adam Jacoby Slemmer and Samuel K. Zook. In 1891, a large obelisk was unveiled at his gravesite, a gift from the Pennsylvania National Guard.

In 1899, an equestrian statue of Hartranft was unveiled in front of the main entrance of the Old State Capitol Building. The commemorative medal at right was worn by participants in the ceremony. Regrettably, in 1927 politicians had it moved to the far edge of the eastern esplanade, overlooking the green. To this day, that statue has become known as the "General in the Park." Perhaps that sad commentary represents the poor fate of one Keystone man who was so critical to our Commonwealth's history.



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Article author Al Gambone is a long-time member of the Camp Curtin Historical Society and author of several books on Union generals. This article is based on his biography of Hartranft, Major-General John Frederick Hartranft, Citizen Soldier and Pennsylvania Statesman (Baltimore, Maryland: Butternut and Blue, 1995).