

Old Hemlock Foundation

Civil War Heritage

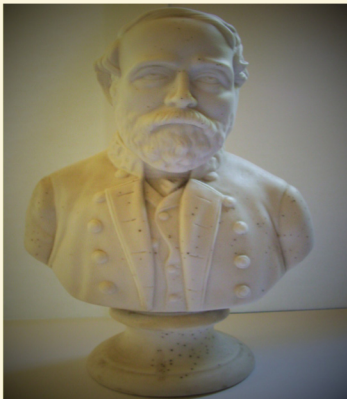


Compton's model 1860 Colt Army Revolver

After the war, Americans set about the difficult task of finding meaning in the last four years of bloodshed. Generations of historians have examined the conflict while public memory of the war has continuously evolved. The historical conversation still goes on and Americans of all backgrounds continue to find fascination from when the country nearly tore itself apart. The dwellers of Old Hemlock were no exception.

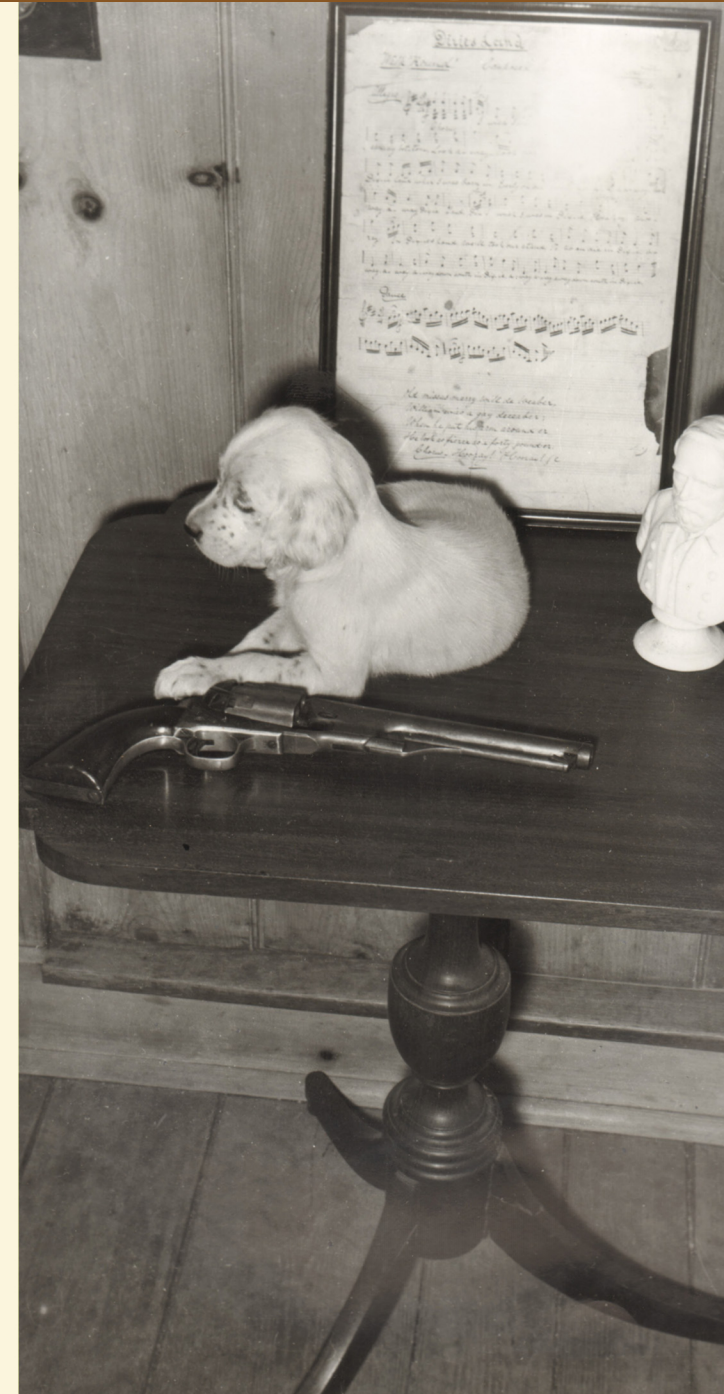
While George and Kay's life revolved around each other and gun dogs, both felt strong connections to their past and cherished their inherited history. Reminders of their Civil War heritage abound at Old Hemlock and it seems fitting that they rest in a state birthed by the war in the possession of decedents from opposite sides of the conflict.

Bust of Confederate General
Robert E. Lee



The Old Hemlock Foundation's mission is to preserve and promote the legacy of George Bird Evans and Kay Harris Evans.

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George's grandfather, Canadian born William J Evans, spent the first years of the war plying his carpentry trade around Chicago before national developments thrust him into the conflict. As casualty lists rose and volunteers dropped off, the Enrollment



William J. Evans in 1919 (b. 1842)

Act (the draft) became law on March 3 1863. While controversial, the act provided Union armies with the raw manpower that crushed the Confederacy in the second half of the war. Mustering in on January 8th 1864, Evans was assigned to the 15th Illinois Infantry and boated down the Mississippi River to Vicksburg MS and the western theater of the war.

Kay's grandfather, Virginia native William B Compton, was studying law when the war heightened underlying divisions in northwestern Virginia. While his home county of Marion became part of West Virginia, Compton's family ties to the eastern Virginia tidewater region led to him enlisting in the 31st Virginia Infantry at war's outbreak in April 1861. Drawn primarily from counties where southern loyalties were in the minority, the 31st became part of the small force tasked with holding the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in a region where communities, neighbors, and families were literally torn apart by war.

Evans first likely action was with Union forces in their February 1864 destruction of the Confederate supply center at Meridian



Dismantling Meridian's railroads. February 1863.

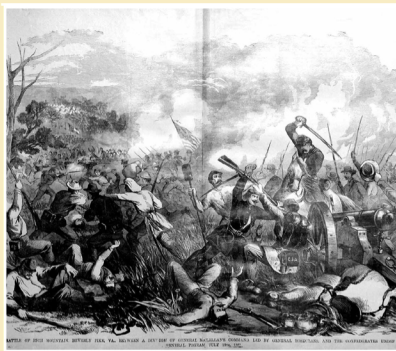
MS. Next, Union armies moved on the railroad hub of Atlanta in May and secured the city on July 22nd. However, the 15th served in reserve or garrison duty for the campaign and saw no action until skirmishes preceding the march on Savannah. In an October 4th firefight near Ackworth GA, Evans was captured and began a war of survival at Andersonville GA.

Pushed out of northwestern Virginia in 1861, fortunes changed with a new year as the 31st outright embarrassed their foes in the wave of 1862

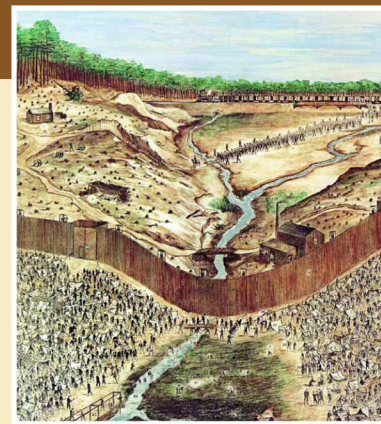
confederate eastern theater victories.

1863 saw fortunes ebb for Compton when he was captured on a recruiting mission on March 20th in

Marion County out of uniform, labeled a spy, and sentenced to hang at the gallows of Fort McHenry—or escape.



Battle of Rich Mountain. July 1861



Andersonville prison.

Poor planning and severe food shortages caused atrocious death rates and rampant malnutrition in southern prisons while northern

peny-pinching resulted in an incusably high prisoner mortality rate. Relief came in letters from home, books, social activities, war rumors, and escape plans, but each day physical and mental health slipped away amid the soul-sucking incarceration, especially when prisoner exchange collapsed in 1863.

At Andersonville, food was minimal, shelter was left to prisoners, and one stream served the camp. Men were reduced to walking skeletons and Evan's tales of surviving off mule fodder are likely not exaggeration. Released on April 5th 1865, his relative late capture made the difference between life and death. Compton enjoyed a better diet, but torments of boredom, homesickness, and a looming hangman's noose took their toll. Escape on May 15th 1864 cheated the sentence and allowed him to rejoin his regiment for the last campaigns in the East.

