

**MILITARY ORDER OF THE LOYAL LEGION OF THE UNITED STATES**



*Loyal Legion Vignettes*



**A CIVIL WAR MONUMENT SERVICE OF REDEDICATION**

**By**  
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**Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States**  
**(November 2004)**



**On Saturday, 4 October 2003 the words of Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (MOLLUS) original Companions Byron R. Pierce (Brigadier General, Brevet Major General, US Volunteers, Michigan) and C.W. Watkins (1st Lieutenant, Adjutant, 10th Michigan Cavalry, Brevet Major, Michigan) once again filled the Grand Rapids, Michigan air. As the master of ceremonies, I had the honor of conducting the service of rededication for one of our nation's most historic Civil War monuments.**

**First dedicated on 17 September 1885, this 34-foot tall, "white bronze" (zinc) Monument was the FIRST monument in the United States to pay tribute to the efforts of women during the war and the FIRST Civil War monument to include a fountain.**

**A faithful sentry, the soldier atop the monument had withstood countless efforts to relocate the monument, destroy it, and replace it with one more fitting, weather and vandalism. But such heroism had created scars, breaks, warped edges, and a backward lean. The fountains, which were reported as "splashing merrily" in 1885, had stopped working in 1982.**

**The General John A. Logan, Camp No. 1, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW), kicked off a \$250,000 fundraising effort on Memorial Day, 30 May 2000 to restore the monument to its original glory. In July of the same year, the MOLLUS Michigan Commandery cast its support behind the effort.**

**Our rally cry was a few of the words spoken by Major Watkins of the 10th Michigan Cavalry, "... That as long as grass grows and water runs, the deeds of the soldiers will be kept fresh and green in the hearts of the people."**

**Over three long, hard years, the money was raised through government contributions, private foundations, and the general public. The group that gave the most, considering what means they had to give, was area students. Through penny drives, rock-a-thon's, letter writing campaigns, and more, they showed their understanding of the need to preserve our history and their patriotism to the tune of nearly \$11,000. A service-learning project, "Together...we CAN do it!" was created for the effort and has been enthusiastically embraced by schools and teachers, not only for the Kent County Monument, but also for other memorials in our communities.**

**This project involves a one-hour living history presentation on life during the Civil War, including ladies' fashions, a soldier and his uniform and equipment as well as President Lincoln and the history of our Civil War memorials. Following this lesson, the students bring in a can of food with a dollar bill of any denomination attached to it; the money goes to our restoration funds and the can goes to an area food bank. Not only do the students learn about our Civil War heritage, they learn the character values of caring, giving and sharing.**

**On 17 May 2003, Mercene Karkadoulis of Karkadoulis Bronze Art, Inc, removed the monument to Cincinnati, Ohio for restoration. It was returned and reassembled this past 27 September.**

**The service I conducted mirrored that of 1885. Since General Sheridan was escorted to the ceremony in a horse-drawn carriage, so too were Michigan's two True Sons, Mr. Edward Blakely (SUVCW Member and Associate of MOLLUS Michigan) and Mr. Harold Becker (SUVCW). The original ceremony included Companions Pierce and Watkins in 1885 as well as numerous others including the guest of honor, Generals Philip Sheridan, George (Pap) Thomas, James Kidd, and Zenas Bliss, and Captain Charles Belknap. In attendance for the rededication were Past Michigan Commandery Commander (MOLLUS) and Past National Commander-in-Chief (SUVCW) Keith Harrison and more.**

**It was a colorful ceremony filled with flags, uniforms, laughter and tears. In repeating the words of Major C.W. Watkins, I said,**



*...Michigan stood in the front rank of loyal States, and nowhere within her boundaries was found a more earnest, determined, and patriotic citizenship than in the County of Kent. This monument, which is today presented to the Grand Army of the Republic, is a testimonial to the value and worth of the brave men who responded to their country's call for aid and died that the Nation might live.*

*Kent County sent to the war 4,214 of her truest and best sons to battle for National unity, constitutional liberty and the old flag. On every prominent battlefield, the history of Kent County's sons is written in their own blood.*

*Oh! the sacrifices made; the weary marches; the fallen comrades; the horrors of Andersonville and Libby Prison; aye! The battlefields of Bull Run, Gettysburg, Lookout Mountain, Chancellorsville, Stone River, and Appomattox, where the Nation's destiny was carved out and where they were in the fore front of the fray. All these rise before us, each with its multitude of reasons why this testimonial to their value, this tribute to their work, this monument, should be dedicated to their memory.*

*...Most nations erect monuments to their great leaders; but today in this memorial we recognize no one above the other, and in ages hence, when every person here has been laid in his final resting place, the stranger within the city's gates, or the prattling child, as they pass by, may ask, Whose monument is that? And the response will be - That monument is erected in honor of the soldiers of Kent County, whose valor made it possible for us to live today in this beautiful, peaceful and prosperous city, under the stars and stripes, fitting emblem of a Union of States and a Nation's authority.*

*Not alone, however, to the soldiers who fought battles is the country indebted for victory. They who at home by voice, vote and act sustained the Government, cared for the loved ones, caused steps to be taken which culminate today in the dedication of this splendid monument - the men whose gratitude is splendidly typified in the fountain symbol, the true sentiment of which is "that so long as grass grows and water runs," the deeds of the soldiers will be kept fresh and green in the hearts of the people. These men I say were heroes and deserve their full meed of praise. And the women in camp, in hospital and home, their prayers, their love and tender care helped to win victories, the world has yet to produce more heroic care than they.*

*This monument is erected in honor of the soldiers of Kent County, living, and dead who have gone to their reward; but to those living it has a double significance. It stands for a Union restored, a people prosperous, united, happy slavery dead, the equality of all men before the law, a Government of the people, and a just appreciation of the services that made all these possible.*

*The soldier dies; this monument and this Government will go on for ages, new generations come, old generations pass away; the fruits of the civil war are permanent and lasting; the victory of the sixties will be the crowning blessing of the twentieth century; it drenched the land in blood and cost us dearly in treasure. We have our reward in bequeathing to coming generations a Union of States firmly established upon the undying principles of free homes, free schools, free speech, and free ballots - the grandest and best Government under the sun.*

The highlight of the day was when Mr. Blakely was given the honor of turning on the power to operate the fountains. It was fitting that in 1885, the words of a man from the 10th Michigan Cavalry challenged us to remember this monument and in 2003, the son of a soldier who had served in the 10th was there to help us remember.

#### A CLOSING NOTE:

On Tuesday, 28 October 2003 "True Son" Brother Edward Blakely passed away at the age of 99, just six weeks from his 100th birthday. Brother Blakely had been the first citizen to donate to the

Monument's restoration and became a member of the General John A. Logan Camp No. 1 in 2000 and served actively as the Chair of the Kent County Civil War Monument Restoration Project Committee. He became an Associate Member of the MOLLUS Michigan Commandery in January 2003 after attending the 2001 National Congress in Richmond. He very often wore a replica cavalry shell jacket with Corporal stripes, just as his father had, in his honor.



Strongly devoted to this effort, he faithfully attended hundreds of events and traveled thousands of miles to help raise funds. In 2001, when the funds were coming in slowly, he commented that, "It is my desire to live long enough to see the Monument rededicated and to stand where my father did in 1885." Brother Blakely's father, Egbert Blakely, had served in the 10th Michigan Cavalry and the 10th held their reunion meetings on September 16 and 17, 1885 and participated in the dedication ceremonies.

On October 4, God granted his wish. The funeral took place Saturday, November 1 and we said goodbye to one of our Commandery's most beloved Brothers; he was wearing his cavalry jacket, with the rededication ceremony button and ribbon still attached and his kepi was at his side. It seemed that completing his work on the Monument was more important than reaching the age of 100.

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