

We the undersigned town officers and twelve freeholders of the town of Deerfield, in the County of Lake do state that a special town meeting is necessary to the interest of said town for the purpose of raising a bounty of two hundred dollars apiece for all the men that has been drafted, or that may hereafter be drafted, for to fill the quota of our town, under the last call of the President, said bounty to be paid as soon as the drafted man has been mustered into the United States service, or furnished an acceptable substitute -- And for the purpose of electing a Highway Commissioner to serve the remainder of the term for which M. Vaughn was elected, -- We would therefore request that immediate notice be given thereof and that such meeting be held at Highland Park on the 4th day of Nov. AD 1864

Witness our hands this 24th day of Oct / 64

Pat Doyle Supervisor
Michael Yore (?) Town Clerk
Martin Sullivan JP
Francis McGovern JP

Town Meeting to Raise a Bounty for Union Soldiers – Background

When the Civil War broke out in April 1861, President Lincoln's initial call for three-month volunteers met with an overwhelmingly positive response. However, following Union defeats at Bull Run and the Peninsular Campaign, the President's request for more men was poorly received. Therefore, in July of 1862 Congress passed the Militia Act. This law required the enrollment of all men between the ages of 18 and 45, granted the President power to issue quotas based on a state's population and to call the militia to serve up to nine months. However, in most cases, the power to draft remained in the hands of the state governors. The act also allowed the President to accept African-Americans into the Union army.

Because the Militia Act did not produce enough soldiers, Congress passed the Enrollment Act (March, 1863), which for the first time in our nation's history placed military conscription (the draft) directly under the control of the national government. 185 enrollment boards -- one for each congressional district -- were established, each under the authority of a military officer. Each board was divided into sub-districts, usually wards in cities and townships in more rural areas. An enrolling officer would go through his assigned area and list all men between the ages of twenty and forty-five. Once the President issued a call for men, each district had about fifty days to fill its quota through volunteers, to avoid its local men being drafted.

To encourage enlistments, national, state, and local governments offered *bounties*, or bonuses for men to join the army. Sometimes these bounties totaled over \$1000 (about three months' wages for a typical workingman). The total collected for bounties by all levels of government during the Civil War exceeded \$700,000,000. So much money was bound to cause problems. "Bounty jumpers" (*skedaddlers*) would accept money to enlist, desert and re-enlist elsewhere for another bounty. A few men "jumped" as much as thirty times. When caught, some died trying to escape by jumping off a train or were executed by a firing squad.

The draft would be held in a public place, either indoors or outside. A blindfolded man would draw names from a container. Usually many more names were drawn than were required. It was assumed that some enrolled men would have moved, already volunteered, run away, or would be excused for medical reasons.

If a man was drafted, he had several choices. He could, of course, agree to serve. He might seek a medical release. Each district had a doctor who heard such appeals. Trying to avoid service, some men had their teeth pulled (so they couldn't chew food or bite off the end of a cartridge) or cut off a finger or toe.

There were two other choices. A man had ten days to choose *commutation*, also called paying an exemption; for \$300 he would be excused from military service. Or he could hire a *substitute* to serve in his place. In some places, men formed draft insurance societies; dues were collected to pay commutation or a substitute for members who were drafted. Some communities imposed a real estate tax to pay for those who did not wish to serve. Employers, like the railroad, would sometimes pay the commutation fee for their skilled workers.

Only those not eligible for the draft could be substitutes -- minors (under twenty years old), aliens, veterans who were willing to serve again, and refugees from the Confederacy. *Brokers*, men who specialized in finding substitutes to fill an area's quota,

would sometimes trick immigrants into the army, kidnap men from Canada, or dye the hair of old men to make them appear younger and, therefore, able to serve.

The draft was generally unpopular. Enrollment officers were sometimes threatened, shot at, or driven from town. A few were even killed. The most famous incident of draft resistance was the New York City Draft Riots in July of 1863. For nearly a week, mobs destroyed large areas of the city. Order was finally restored with the help of Union troops sent from their recent victory at Gettysburg.

The draft may have been unpopular, because it was often perceived as “a rich man’s war, and a poor man’s fight,” since wealthy people could pay for commutation or hire a substitute. However, some data indicates that men in poorer communities were able to afford the \$300 for commutation or a substitute. Commutation officially ended in July of 1864, in part to be fair to those who could not afford this fee. Ironically, this may have hurt the poor by increasing the price of substitutes (historians do not agree on this).

Although nearly 777,000 men’s names were drawn, only about 46,000 were actually drafted – less than 6%. What the Enrollment Act did was to spur men to avoid the draft – through running away, medical deferment, commutation, hiring a substitute or, most importantly, volunteering and receiving a bonus. For the last two years of the war, draftees and substitutes totaled only about 13% of men raised for the Union army.

The Confederacy also had a draft. It did not allow commutation but did permit substitution. It also exempted men responsible for twenty or more slaves. Several state governments sued the national government over conscription. After all, should a nation fighting for states rights allow a national draft?

The document that accompanies this background reading deals with a Deerfield Township meeting called to raise a bounty for the latest Presidential call for troops (at that time, “Deerfield” referred to the township; the Village of Deerfield wasn’t established until 1902). In the fall of 1864, President Lincoln issued the third of four draft calls. Although winning the war, the Union Army of the Potomac had been facing dreadful casualties fighting Lee’s Confederates that spring and summer in battles such as the Wilderness, Cold Harbor, and Petersburg. In order to attract more men to serve, bounties were becoming more expensive. It is no wonder that our township decided to call a special meeting to approve a bounty.

For further reading:

James W. Geary, We Need Men: The Union Draft in the Civil War. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991.

Eugene C. Murdock, One Million Men: The Civil War Draft in the North. Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1971.

Eugene C. Murdock, Patriotism Limited, 1862-1865: The Civil War Draft and the Bounty System. Kent State University Press, 1967.

“Town Meeting to Raise a Bounty for Union Soldiers”

1. Define the following:

- a. bounty -- _____
- b. skedaddler -- _____
- c. commutation -- _____
- d. substitute -- _____
- e. broker -- _____

2. Document:

- a. For what two reasons was this special township meeting called?
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
- b. How much bounty would be offered each soldier? _____
- c. Under what two circumstances would the bounty be paid?
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
- d. (Further research) The meeting was to be held on _____.
What important event occurred four days later? --

3. Background:

- a. Why did men stop volunteering in large numbers for the army? –

b. What did the Enrollment Act do for the first time in our nation's history?

c. How did bounties sometimes cause problems? _____

d. How might a poor man afford \$300 for commutation? _____

e. What evidence supports the argument that the draft was unpopular?

f. Why did President Lincoln call for a draft in the fall of 1864?

g. In what way(s) did the draft help to raise soldiers for the Union Army?
