

Benjamin Perley Poore — Celebrity, Journalist, Washington Insider, “Soldier in Tastes and Habits”

Benjamin Perley Poore (self-styled Ben: Perley Poore in imitation of Geo: Washington) was born on November 2, 1820, to [Mary Perley Dodge and wealthy businessman Col. Benjamin Poore](#), whose forebears acquired the family estate at West Newbury’s Indian Hill Farm in [1650](#). A celebrity, journalist, Washington insider, collector, farmer, and much more, Poore’s larger story can be [seen here](#). This Minute History concerns his role as “[a soldier in his tastes and habits](#).... He loved martial music. The drum beat for his ear, the bugle note was his call; the tramp of moving regiments was his delight.”

A boys’ company commander as a youth, Poore launched his military career when, “[w]ith much labor and expense he organized and commanded the [First Rifle Battalion of Massachusetts](#).” Consistent with democratic militia protocols, the members voted to elect their leader—Major Poore—on [December 8, 1852](#). The Rifle Battalion, with companies comprising the West Newbury Rifle Rangers, Byfield Sharpshooters, Poore’s Rifle Guard, Rowley, and the [Amesbury Union Brass Band](#), mustered, marched, and made military displays.

To celebrate [1853’s Fourth of July](#), Company A of the Rifle Battalion joined Boston’s Pulaski’s Guards for a dress parade at a large reception at Poore’s Indian Hill Farm. In [1856](#) Poore’s Rifle Battalion sponsored a military picnic in Rowley, with marches, a dress parade, and music by the Bay State Band of Salem. At a statewide gathering of Massachusetts militia in 1859, Poore’s Rifle Battalion’s “peculiar maneuvers” gained “considerable attention and amusement.” Their “[Zouave drill](#)” involved “sending forward bodies of skirmishers in advance; these skirmishers lying down and firing; rallying by gro[ups] of four and executing a bayonet exercise with their formidable sab[er] bayonets; rallying on the reserves at double quick time, and other novel movements.” At this event, the First Rifle Battalion also achieved notoriety when Poore, “thinking to revenge on the Governor for having selected another command as his guard of honor,” declined the order to give three cheers for Liberty, but rather had his soldiers break rank, “[sitting and lying upon the grass](#).”

[When the Civil War broke out](#), members of the Rifle Battalion awaited orders at West Newbury’s [Camp Sylvester](#), going on to the [Massachusetts 19th Infantry Regiment](#). As part of the [Army of the Potomac](#), the 19th saw action in many of the most important Civil War battles, not least Antietam, Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, and Cold Harbor. Although he participated in the [19th’s reunions](#) after the war, Poore did not fight as part of his former command.

Instead, Poore, still primarily working in Washington, D.C., was [elected a Major](#) in the 8th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment, another Essex County volunteer militia predating the war. The [8th Massachusetts](#), one of the first to respond to President Lincoln’s call for troops, served in [three Civil War tours](#). Its initial 90-day tour was largely in Maryland, where soldiers guarded the frigate Constitution and Fort McHenry, and worked to repair and maintain the railroad near Annapolis.

Poore served during the 8th’s first term. His [military records](#) say he mustered in as a Major on May 10, 1861 and out with the same rank on August 1, 1861, when the first term of duty ended. In late summer of 1862, the 8th was again called to serve, this time for [nine months](#). At that point, [press announcements](#) reported Poore’s resignation: “He was among the first to go to the war, but contracted disease in the service (lumbago) which rendered him unfit for duty....”

Whatever his contributions to the fight, Poore was, according to a [soldier’s dispatch](#), “quite a favorite among the troops.... On our arrival in Washington ..., Major Poore was the first to offer assistance.... There are times when a word of advice, or the interposition of friends, will do much to relieve the pressing necessities of others. But these favors combined with a generous heart and an open purse, are more effective and demand a warmer gratitude.”

After the war, Poore continued to support the veterans of the 8th and 19th Regiments, hosting their gatherings at Indian Hill and speaking at their annual reunions. He died in Washington on May 29, 1887 and is buried at Walnut Hill Cemetery in West Newbury.

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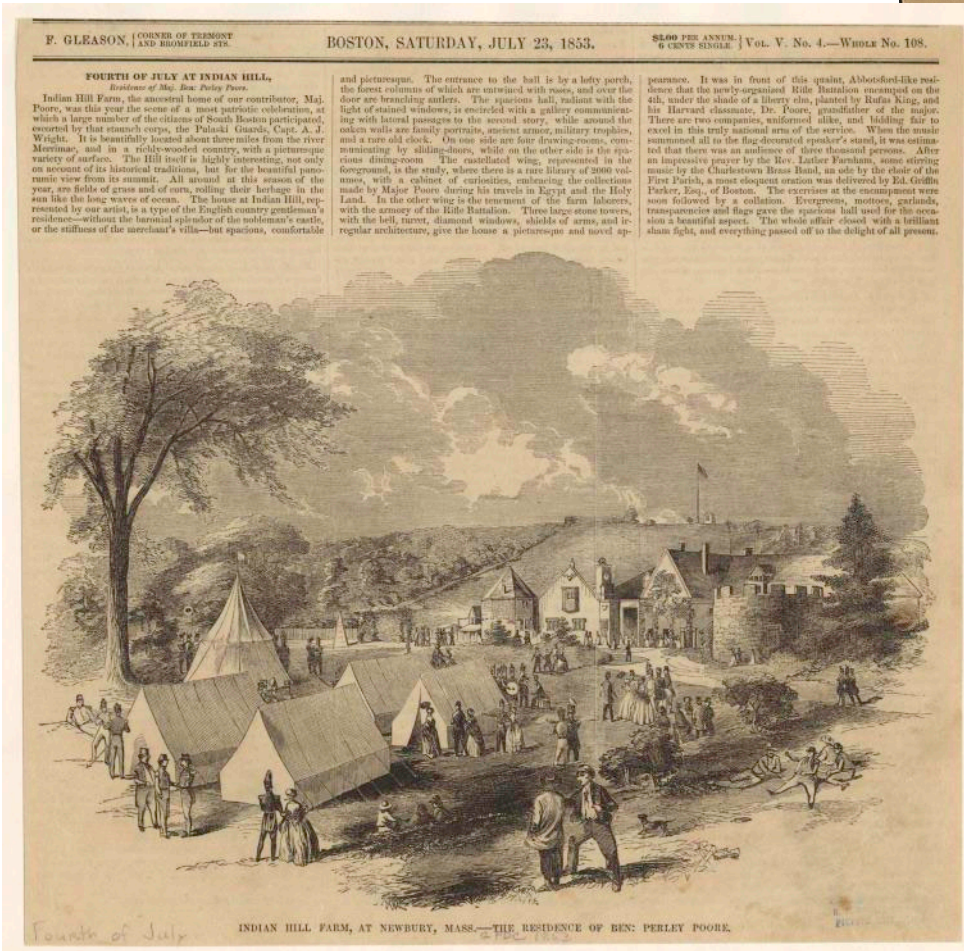


Ben: Perley Poore in Civil War Uniform
 Source: Civilwardata.com



8th Regiment, Newburyport
 Source: Digitalcommonwealth.com

Civil War Veterans at Indian Hill Farm
 Source: Digitalcommonwealth.com



4th of July, 1853, at Indian Hill Farm
 Source: New York Public Library