

[Camp Sylvester in West Newbury](#) was a sort of holding station for eager would-be Union soldiers awaiting orders to march. Immediately after the Civil War broke out in April of 1861, some young men were more ready to enlist than the army was ready to accept them.

One was John G.B. Adams of Groveland, who walked to West Newbury to join Company A of the 1st Battalion of Rifles, an old militia company (“Poore’s Savages”) under command of Maj. Ben. Perley Poore. According to [Captain Adams’ reminiscences](#), he and his brother enrolled their names at West Newbury Town Hall. They donned green uniforms and, Captain Adams reported, engaged in “a peculiar drill. Most of it, as I can remember, consisted of running around the town hall in single file, giving an Indian war-whoop and firing into the corner of the hall as we ran.”

Camp Sylvester was set up on July 1, 1861, in response to the enlistees’ exasperation at the long wait for orders. Captain Adams explained, “Men were leaving every day, going to other States or to regiments that had been ordered to the front. At last we rebelled, and sent our officers to the Governor with a vote passed by the company, that unless we were ordered into camp at once we would disband. After a few days we were furnished with a large tent for the men, a wall tent for the officers and a supply of rations. Our camp was located on the land of one of our members, Private Sylvester, and was named ‘Camp Sylvester.’”

Census records at that time identified West Newbury’s only land-owning Sylvester as Combmaker Samuel Sylvester, who in 1843 bought what is now 16 Pleasant Street (discussed in the 2018 [Historic Sites Inventory](#)), and whose veteran’s records show him as a private in the G.A.R. 19th Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers. His son, Lt. George Sylvester of the 9th New Hampshire Regiment, died at age 26 of wounds incurred at the battle of Spotsylvania. [George P. Sylvester is buried in section A of West Newbury’s Merrimack Cemetery along with his family and his father Samuel](#), who died in West Newbury at the age of 87 in 1887.

Captain Adams reported that activities at Camp Sylvester were what might be expected of bored and anxious fellows waiting to be off to war: “Our discipline in Camp Sylvester was not as strict as it was later in the war. We mounted one guard. After we had been once around we concluded that the lieutenants ought to stand their share, so we put them on. One night we caught a calf and after the officers were asleep we turned him into their tent. We did many things that later would have sent us to the guard-house.”

Camp Sylvester was no more near the end of July of 1861, when the West Newbury soldiers were ordered to Lynnfield to join the 19th Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers. Our impatient enlistees were not mustered in until the [end of August, 1861](#), for a three-year tour of duty that included many famous battles throughout Virginia and on to Gettysburg.

Camp Sylvester, Civil War Enlistees' Way Station



*"A Yankee Volunteer"—Library of Congress image
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/ppmsca.20621/>*

Marker Location: 16 Pleasant St., West Newbury, MA Latitude: 42.790322 Longitude: -71.001711