

## LEET GUARDS

Within days of the 11 April 1861 Confederate attack on Fort Sumter in South Carolina's Charleston Harbor, President Lincoln called for 75,000 troops to suppress the armed rebellion. Pennsylvania's quota was set at sixteen regiments.

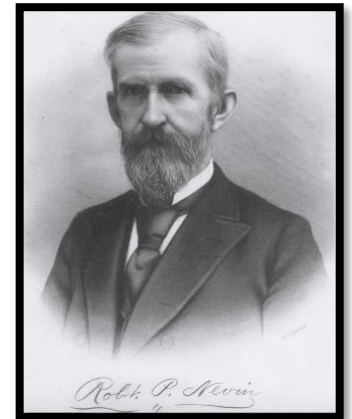
Allegheny County's Committee of Public Safety was tasked with feeding, clothing and equipping recruits. Individuals and businesses enthusiastically supported fundraising events to supply what was needed. Amid the flurry of patriotic outpourings, the county's first regiment was organized by 22 April.

As well as providing for active duty recruits, the Committee was also responsible for organizing Home Guard companies, men who would take up arms in the event of a Confederate attack on Allegheny County. Equipped with muskets and rifles, guardsmen were seen as a pool of future recruits for the regular army. A total of 5,500 men enlisted in the county's Home Guards, which included Sewickley Township's *Leet Guards*.

On the evening of 30 April 1861, neighbors gathered at the Sewickley Township home of thirty-two-year-old farmer Michael Marlatt. Twenty-five of those in attendance immediately volunteered for the Guards, electing John K. Wilson president, Robert Stephenson vice, John Way, Jr. secretary and Thomas L. Shields treasurer.

A second meeting was held a few days later, again at the Marlatt home. More names were added to the roll for a total of fifty-seven guardsmen. Thirty-nine-year-old merchant Robert P. Nevin was voted Captain, pledging to "lead his gallant company forward to meet the Southern rebels whenever they attempt to descend the river hills."

The *Leet Guards* under Captain Nevin and the neighboring *Sewickley Guards* under Captain White were assigned to Allegheny County's Third Brigade, Fifth Regiment and would have received rudimentary military training. Uniforms were not required. Thirty-eight members of the *Leet Guards* took part in Pittsburgh's massive July 4<sup>th</sup> parade that year.



Further mention of the *Leet Guards* was made in September 1862 when the company participated in the funeral of three Sewickley soldiers who fell at the Battle of Antietam. The Sunday afternoon service was held in Sewickley's newly built Presbyterian church before an overflow crowd. Guardsmen were part of the procession to the hilltop Sewickley Cemetery where they fired volleys over the soldiers' graves.



As the people of the Sewickley Valley were burying the three young soldiers, one of whom was a minister's son, thirty-nine men from Sewickley Township and sixty-three from Sewickley Borough were serving in active duty Pennsylvania regiments.

Following the September 1862 funeral, no further mention of the *Leet Guards* has been found. It may be assumed that the men simply carried on with their daily pursuits, while standing ready to answer the call, if needed.

Sewickley Cemetery's Veterans Monument (1865)