

The Heidelberg Township School Board in the Civil War

Written by Raymond E. Hollenbach at Royersford in March, 1960



Saegersville Schoolhouse pictured to the left.

The problem of getting the free schools under way had just about been solved when a new task was thrust upon the school board – that of levying and collecting taxes to raise money for bounties to be paid to men to fill the draft quotas of the army.

When the Civil War broke out, volunteers in Heidelberg were just as numerous as elsewhere – the young men were just as patriotic as any other young men. Levi

Krause, the president of the school board, resigned in October 1862 to enter the army. He was discharged a short time later and then re-elected to the board and as president to serve during the most troublous times.

After the battle of Bull Run the glamour of army life quickly wore off, and people began to realize what a terrible thing war is. As a result, when President Lincoln issued a call for 300,000 men in August 1862, the order stated that if the men were not forthcoming as volunteers by August 15th the balance of the quota would be drafted. This was the first Civil War draft.

The number on the list to report for this draft in Heidelberg was fifty. Of these, fourteen were accepted and joined the army for the specified time, namely nine months. Four others personally secured nine-months substitutes; twenty-three paid \$300 each to buy "three year substitutes"; and the rest were exempt for physical disability and other reasons. The draft age was from 21 to 45 years.

In October 1863 the President issued a call for another 300,000 men to be drafted if an insufficient number volunteered. Thirty-nine men were on Heidelberg's list to be called before the draft board. The bottom of the barrel had already been reached, and out of this number only one was mustered into the service. Several furnished substitutes, five more men paid \$300 for a three year exemption, and the rest were exempt for various reasons.

Before this draft was fully completed, Lincoln increased the number to 500,000 in February 1864, and now the trouble really started. During the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 the practice of sending a substitute was a common custom among the men of the militia. This was of course the first thing that everybody thought about. The state legislature was in session and a law was under consideration to regulate this practice and make legal the laying of taxes to buy substitutes. However, the matter was urgent and no time was to be wasted. In Heidelberg, in order to create as little antagonism as possible, a mass meeting of citizens was called to decide what was to be done. The minutes of this meeting, March 11, 1864, are found among the minutes of the regular school board, but the treasurer of the school board opened a separate account book which is labeled "Book of Bounty Taxes of the Treasurer of the Heidelberg School District." The information in the paragraphs that follow is taken from these two sources.

In order to fully understand what went on, it is best to quote part of the minutes of this mass meeting:

"Whereas a number of citizens of Heidelberg met, in conjunction with a majority of the School Board, at the house of Peter Miller in Saegersville on Friday the 11th day of March 1864, for the purpose of devising ways and means to evade the impending draft, it was then agreed at the said meeting to levy and assess a tax upon said Township of Heidelberg to the amount of \$8855.54, for the purpose of filling the quota of said township by paying bounties to volunteers that shall be mustered into the United States military service and credited to said Township of Heidelberg, with the understanding that if said tax could not be collected of the citizens of said township and they should refuse to pay the same voluntarily, that the same should be collected by authority of the law in contemplation. It was then agreed that said tax be levied and assessed in the manner following, viz: - Each inhabitant of said township liable to the draft shall pay a per capita tax of Twenty Dollars, and each and every male taxable inhabitant of the township above the age of 45 years whose

valuation in the last annual assessment made for said township appears to be over Three Hundred Dollars shall also pay a per capita tax of \$20.00, the balance to make up the required sum of \$8855.54 is to be levied by percentage (16 mills) on each taxable inhabitant drafted and those who have paid commutation money or furnished substitutes for the military service of the United States for three years."

It will be noted that a law permitting such taxes had not yet actually been passed. However, immediately after the mass meeting the school board had a meeting to make the above action "legal". A committee was appointed – one man in each of the nine subdistricts of the township to collect the tax; and another committee was appointed to proceed immediately to procure "volunteers to fill the quota of the township."



Germansville Schoolhouse pictured above.

The law making this procedure legal was passed by the Pennsylvania legislature on March 25, 1864. Some of the citizens balked at paying the taxes and about \$1500 remained to be collected by the constable. In the meantime the actual draft had taken place in February and in order to meet the emergency, eleven citizens volunteered to sign a note to get a loan of \$4000 from the Allentown Bank. Heidelberg had to furnish 26 men in this draft. Only four could be found in the township, and Owen A. Miller was delegated to find substitutes elsewhere at \$300 each and bring them to the draft board whose headquarters was at Norristown. The four men from the township were paid the same as the others and the sum paid out for this draft was \$7800, plus small incidentals.

The matters pertaining to this draft had not been cleaned up entirely before President Lincoln issued a call for another 200,000 on April 15, 1864. Heidelberg's quota was ten men. There was nothing to do but levy another tax. This one at \$1.30 per hundred dollars of assessment brought in about \$2800.00. The ten "volunteers" purchased for this draft were all strangers.

The war had been going rather badly and on July 18, 1864 a call was issued for 500,000. Heidelberg had to furnish thirty of these. This was too much for the school board to handle alone and another mass meeting was called, on July 23rd, to decide what to do. Two taxes had already been collected, but it was decided that the best thing to do was to levy a per capita tax of \$10.00, and borrow from a bank whatever additional money was needed. History tells us that the procuring of "volunteers" in this manner had already become a problem throughout the entire country, as some of these "volunteers" deserted almost immediately after they were inducted and then "volunteered" again in some other place under some other name for another bounty. The price of the bounty had already gone up to \$400, and for the last five men of this draft Heidelberg had to pay \$520 each. Ten men from the township volunteered for this draft at \$400 each and accepted notes for this amount, at six percent, instead of cash. This reduced the amount borrowed from the bank, but when this draft was completed there was an outstanding debt of \$13,500.

To pay off part of this debt, the school board met on November 16, 1864, and levied a tax on the property assessment at a rate of \$5.75 per hundred. This was to raise about \$12,000 but not all could be collected.

The last draft that had to be met was made on December 19, 1864, and Heidelberg's quota was 21 men. Even though the preceding tax had not all been collected there was nothing to do but to levy still another – this time a per capita tax of \$25.00. Two men from the township volunteered and the other 19 men were strangers who "volunteered" for \$460 each.

The tax burdens had become so heavy and the problems of the school board so involved that, in January 1865, the president of the board and one other member resigned. Where a few hundred dollars had been collected to pay for the public schools almost the same number of thousands of dollars were levied to pay bounties. The wonder is that many of the

poorer citizens could raise the cash. To top it off, Lincoln issued another draft call to take effect April 29, 1865. Fortunately, Lee's surrender made this draft unnecessary.

The troubles, however, were not over. There were a lot of outstanding loans, more than \$8000 of which were due. To take care of this the board levied the last bounty tax, as of August 26, 1865, at the rate of \$4.50 per hundred. After discounts for prompt payment and exonerations, this brought in \$9159. There were considerable taxes overdue from earlier levies which even the constable had not been able to collect. The state legislature in July 1866 passed a special law to remedy some of the defects of the earlier law and make such collections possible. Under this law, Constable William Fry of Heidelberg sold a cow and heifer belonging to Franklin Walter, Jr., for \$44.75 to collect back taxes. This was the only instance when resort had to be taken to such means.

All told, in about seventeen months, the school board, acting as the bounty board, had levied six taxes for a total of about \$38,000. The last taxes were not collected and the final accounting was not made until October 1869, when it was found that there were several thousand dollars left in the treasury.

The question was what to do with this money. Should it be distributed among those who had been subject to the draft? Should those who had actually served under the draft receive it? Or, should it be paid into the treasury of the school board? The matter decided by the voters at the general election on November 2, 1869. The men that would benefit by the first proposition were in the majority, and the decision was overwhelmingly in that favor. Accordingly, \$17.23 was paid in cash to each of 122 men – 68 of these had avoided the draft by buying "three year substitutes," 32 had in one way or another provided their own substitutes, and only 22 had actually been mustered into the army. One may ask, "What did the men who enlisted early and served throughout the war get?" They received the glory!



About the Author: Raymond E. Hollenbach

He was 98 years young when he passed on July 15, 1991. Born in Saegersville, he was a son of the late James O. and Cora I. (Metzger) Hollenbach. He was the husband of the late Flora E. (Dreibelbis) Hollenbach.

He was the oldest member of the Lutheran congregation of the Heidelberg Union Church, Heidelberg Township.

Hollenbach graduated from Kutztown Normal School, now Kutztown University, in 1911, and from Pierce Business School, Philadelphia, in 1916.

He was a sergeant major in the Army during World War I, serving in France with the 315th Infantry. He was personal assistant to the vice president of the Sun Co., Philadelphia, before retiring in 1963 after working 47 years of service. From 1911 until 1916, he taught in one-room public schoolhouses in Washington and North Whitehall townships.

An amateur historian, he also compiled the histories of more than 25 churches in Lehigh, Berks and northern Montgomery counties.