

CHAPTER TWO

1866-67 – New Kids on the Block

Knightstown Springs; fifty-four beautiful acres of farmland, excellent soil, lots of spring water-just the spot for young Civil War veterans to lick their wounds. So, the Governor and his pals got together and bought the Springs. On the first day of March, 1867, the Home for Disabled Soldiers became an institution of the State of Indiana. It was formally opened on June 15, 1867, occupying a hotel on the west side of the road running south out of Knightstown, IN.

Here came the vets, 147 of them from all points Indiana; a few from Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Rhode Island, New York, West Virginia, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Missouri, Tennessee and Maryland-182 in all. Boy, you just can't keep a good deal quiet, now can you?

Settling in nicely, soon the vets look out over some 35 cultivated acres of sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, beans, cabbage, onions, tomatoes, turnips-wow! Taking a look over their shoulders they could even see 100 apple trees, all bearing gorgeous fruit. What a lovely place to care for our Civil War heroes.

One of the patriots attending the Governor's meeting of 1865 was Mr. George Merritt of Indianapolis. He was the first advocate of a home for soldiers' orphans. His sympathetic soul had responded to his experiences during the war, in hospitals and on the battlefields, where he cared for the wounded and dying. Mr. Merritt realized the dying soldiers were anxious about what would happen to their families, and he pledged to see that they were provided for. To fulfill this pledge, he gave \$5,000 for their benefit and advocated for the others attending the meeting to do the same. Done, and done.

In April, 1866 an angel by the name of Miss Susan Fussell moved to Knightstown Springs, willing and able to undertake the care of the orphans. Here they came, some 10 kids about as puzzled and confused as any kid who ever lived. But, they were blessed by the care of their angel, Miss Fussell, as they moved into the cottage on the hill on the east side of the road. The first Board of Trustees, which consisted of Henry B. Hill, Charles S. Hubbard and William Hannaman, appointed Dr. M. M. Wishard, long identified with our Home, the first Superintendent. With such humble, promising actions, the first Soldiers' Orphans' Home began.

Then, on the first day of March, 1867, the Home for Disabled Soldiers became a place for not only sick and disabled soldiers and seamen, but also of their widows and orphans.

PaTowne '54
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