

# Dorence Atwater, Plymouth's Civil War Hero

Dorence Atwater grew up in the Terryville section of Plymouth. He enlisted in the Union Army in 1861 and was captured by Confederate forces in 1863. In February 1864, he was moved to the infamous Andersonville prison camp in Georgia, where 45,000 Union soldiers were squeezed into 26 acres. Diseases such as scurvy, dysentery, and malaria were rampant. Almost 13,000 men died while in captivity and were buried in unmarked trenches. Atwater kept a secret list of the names of the dead. When he was released in February 1865, he smuggled out his list so the families of the deceased could be notified.

After the War, he and Clara Barton returned to the prison camp to properly mark the graves and establish the Andersonville National Cemetery. He and Barton became lifelong friends.

In 1868, Atwater became U.S. consul to the Seychelles, an island chain off the east coast of Africa. In 1871, President Ulysses Grant appointed Atwater as U.S. consul to Tahiti. Atwater married a Tahitian princess and spent most of the rest of his life in the Pacific, running successful businesses such as a steamship line and a vanilla plantation. Clara Barton came to Plymouth's Centennial Celebration in 1895 to honor her friend, and returned on Memorial Day in 1907 for the dedication of this monument. The cannon is a Rodman gun from a fort at Boston Harbor.

Atwater returned to Terryville in 1908 to see this monument. He died in 1910 and is buried in Tahiti. The Tahitian word "TUPUATAAROA" is inscribed on his gravestone. It means "wise man".



Dorence Atwater  
CT State Library



Confederate prisoner of war camp at Andersonville, GA  
Andersonville National Historic Site



Clara Barton, founder of the  
American Red Cross  
Andersonville National Historic Site