

# WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

*A series of tributes to hometown people and events that have shaped our history.*

## John J.P. Blinn

**T**hough Terre Haute native John J.P. Blinn was only 23 years old when he died at Gettysburg during the Civil War, the legacy of his commitment and patriotism has persevered for 136 years.

One of six children of Horace and Dorothea (Froment) Blinn, John was raised at 433 N. Third Street and matriculated to Wabash College in 1858 at age 18. Soon after enrolling, he became entranced by the Montgomery (County) Guards, a volunteer military organization founded by Lt. Lew Wallace, lawyer and Mexican War veteran. Wallace's precision drill corps — dressed in the colorful attire of French Zouaves — marched through Crawfordsville streets weekly to the admiration of citizens and students. Blinn boldly and successfully solicited Wallace to assist in the founding of the Wabash College Cadet Corps. Blinn was elected captain. Using Wallace's influence, the college corps received government rifles. Without a gymnasium or organized sports for diversion, the all-male student body found the Cadet Corps a popular exercise. By 1860 the Montgomery Guards was judged the best drill company in the Middle West and Blinn's company was deemed the best college unit. On several occasions, the Wabash College Cadets entertained crowds in downtown Indianapolis.

On Nov. 5, 1860, Horace Blinn — esteemed Terre Haute pioneer and co-founder of the First Congregational Church — was killed near Merom during a hunting expedition. John devoted even more attention to the College Cadet Corps during his grieving. On April 21, 1861 — soon after Fort Sumter — Blinn enlisted in Company F of the 14th Indiana Regiment at Camp Vigo in Terre Haute. Due to his literacy and military training, he was given the rank of captain and was designated adjutant general of the regiment, causing resentment among some subordinates. However, by October 1862, Blinn's effectiveness in the field seemed to quell the rancor. On April 7, 1863, he was promoted to assistant adjutant general of the First Brigade, 2nd Corps, under Gen. William Harrow.

During Gen. Pickett's charge on July 3, 1863, Capt. Blinn was mortally wounded in the thigh at Gettysburg. He lingered until July 14, allowing his mother an opportunity to visit him. On his death bed, Blinn drafted several dramatic patriotic messages to "the boys back home." His body was returned for burial at Terre Haute's Woodlawn Cemetery. Besides being praised by the press and from the pulpit, Blinn was enshrined at the Wabash College Roll of Honor, lauding student soldiers, "heroic youth dead on field of glory." A few years ago, Blinn was featured in a book about heroes at Gettysburg by author Gregory Coco.

The Vigo County Historical Society possesses significant memorabilia about the "boy soldier" who sacrificed his life for his country.



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