Certainly there are other ways of discovering the service record of a Civil War soldier than by examining muster rolls. Multi-volume sets of official records were published around the turn of the 20th century. Web pages on the Internet are searchable and printable.

But neither of these sources evokes a sense of time like the actual handwritten muster rolls created 150 years ago.

When a company was formally established, the captain
# MUSTER-OUT ROLL

of Captain Darcy Greaves

by the President

unless sooner discharged; from the 28th day of

21st Infantry

Present and Absent

Joined for Service and Enrolled

Commencement of First

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Each Grade</th>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Where</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>David Graves</td>
<td>Capt</td>
<td>27 July 1855</td>
<td>Dubuque Iowa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>William H. Lorenz</td>
<td>1st Lt</td>
<td>20 Aug 1855</td>
<td>Dubuque Iowa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>George J. Moore</td>
<td>2nd Lt</td>
<td>23 Aug 1855</td>
<td>Dubuque Iowa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>James Hill</td>
<td>1st Lt</td>
<td>39 Aug 1855</td>
<td>Des Moines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bearman Buel</td>
<td>3rd Lt</td>
<td>29 March 1855</td>
<td>Davenport Iowa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Samuel Bates</td>
<td>3rd Lt</td>
<td>24 Aug 1855</td>
<td>Des Moines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
recorded basic information on his enlistees. This muster roll traveled with the company and was updated as the company changed in composition.

When a company disbanded and its soldiers were discharged, the company captain prepared a muster-out roll, with additional information on promotions and reenlistments; military engagements and duties; imprisonment and release; injuries, illnesses, deaths, and sometimes place of burial. The creation and maintenance of the Union army’s muster rolls were outlined in a manual of military regulations, and each muster-out roll emphasized that “every man whose name is on previous rolls, must be accounted for.”

The importance of the muster-out rolls was not lost on state and federal officials. At the time the rolls were completed, multiple sets were created for each company. For the most part, the origi-
nal records stayed with company commanders and were often found among their personal effects after they had died. Other sets were sent to the War Department in Washington; one was eventually used to create the Compiled Military Service Records for validating applications for pensions and other veterans’ benefits. Additional sets were sent to the capitals of the states where the companies had been formed and eventually transferred to state archives and historical societies. Here at the State Historical Society of Iowa, the muster rolls are part of the Iowa Adjutant General Records in the State Archives in our Des Moines center.

Muster-out rolls are actually large ledger sheets, many of them nearly a square yard in dimension; others are about 11” x 17”. Over the decades, due to heavy use by researchers and the acidity of the paper, the muster rolls have become extremely brittle and fragile. To slow the process of aging and deterioration—and
Above: Fortunately, not all of the muster rolls are this damaged. Most paper after 1850, including muster rolls, was made of highly acidic wood pulp rather than rags. Over time, the muster rolls have turned brittle and deteriorated along the folds. These pieces will be reconnected and additional conservation measures taken.

To remove creases, the conservator dampens them with cotton swaps and then weights them down.

Thin but strong Japanese paper and wheat paste are used for repairing tears and reattaching fragments.

Surface dirt is removed with a dry, non-abrasive sponge made of natural rubber.

An alkaline solution is applied by brush or spray to neutralize destructive acids and extend the life of the document.
to preserve them as the authentic documents that they are—work has begun on conserving some 500 muster-out rolls, only a portion of the entire collection. This work is possible thanks to an appropriation from the Iowa General Assembly, proceeds from the sale of Profiles of Valor by Dennis Black and published by the State Historical Society of Iowa—and because of the technical skills, materials, and equipment in SHSI’s paper conservation lab in the Iowa City center.

Conserving the muster rolls takes time, skill, and a steady hand. (The steps are described on the left.) When the work is completed on a muster roll, it is encapsulated in Mylar, a clear polyester film that protects the document and allows handling.

Once safeguarded for generations to come, the muster rolls will continue to bear witness to the men in a company and their commitment to the nation and to each other. For every individual listed, the roll reveals the contours of his years in service. Although the information is brief and basic, the handwritten words hint at the courage, stamina, suffering, and life-changing experiences of a Civil War soldier.

—by Timothy Walch, Iowa Heritage Illustrated volunteer

Where to begin researching Iowa Civil War service records

• An excellent place to start is the six-volume Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers in the War of the Rebellion: Together with Historical Sketches of Volunteer Organizations, 1861–1866. This source includes information from official records, including muster-out rolls, and is available in the Des Moines and Iowa City libraries of the State Historical Society of Iowa.

• To see what kinds of Civil War resources are available at the State Historical Society, visit www.iowahistory.org and scroll down under “Collections.” The Adjutant General Records and Grand Army of the Republic Collection are particularly rich in Civil War resources. (While on the home page, be sure to check out SHSI’s museum collections online and the Iowa Battle Flags Project.) SHSI librarians and archivists are eager to help.

• For an online version of Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers, visit www.iagenweb.org/civilwar/books/logan.htm. Click on “Rosters.”

• For information on 6.3 million Union and Confederate soldiers, visit www.itd.nps.gov/cwss.

• For veterans records at the National Archives, visit www.nara.gov/veterans.