# How Anthony Road got its name

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by John Creamer, MLS
for the *Chronicle-Express*

*Editor's Note: This is the first in a three part series of a paper written by John Creamer, MLS, the reference librarian at the Penn Yan Public Library. It details local ties with the Spanish-American War.*

History, it's been said, doesn't exactly repeat itself. It just reuses themes. If I told you that this story would include an American battleship that was destroyed in a faraway harbor, and thereby started a war, you might think of the *USS Arizona* at Pearl Harbor. If I mentioned an unpopular South Pacific war against self-declared freedom fighters that dragged on for years and cost many American lives, you might think of Vietnam. If I mentioned Corregidor and Bataan you might think of the Death March and the desperate battles against the Japanese in 1942. But history has used these themes before, just one hundred years ago.

What we remember of history often centers around a date or event. We remember where we were on December 7, 1941 or November 22, 1963. We remember the first sputnik, the first space flight, the first moon landing. We remember a stock market crash or a Woodstock. But there's always more than we can remember. Some say that's why history reuses those themes.

February 15, 1898 is a date now largely forgotten, and practically out of living memory. But it was an important date nonetheless, for what's now being called the American Century began that day, at exactly 9:40 p.m. Eastern Standard Time.

white battleship was a reassurance to Americans and Cubans - and a challenge to the Spanish.

Private Bill took a long stroll on deck to postpone retiring to his steaming hammock below. There was no air conditioning then - in fact, the *Maine* was the first US Navy vessel to have electric lights. It was just as well for Bill that he dawdled, for at exactly 9:40 p.m. he and a number of others, on board the *Maine* and elsewhere around the harbor, saw a sheet of orange flame envelop the bow of the battleship. The explosion that followed was so tremendous that an eyewitness on another ship said that the *Maine* was lifted nearly out of the water by its force.

An orderly, among other things, is expected to convey messages. In the aftermath of the explosion, Private Bill realized that he had to get a message to Captain Sigsbee. He ran to the captain's cabin in the dark (unlike those of the *Titanic* a few years later, the *Maine's* electric light went out forever with the explosion). The captain, not unaware that something had happened to the ship (he said later that he thought they were being fired upon by nearby Spanish guns), emerged from his cabin just as Private Bill arrived. In the darkness, the two men collided. Captain Sigsbee, a frail, elderly man, must have come off the worse: Bill Anthony was over 6 feet tall and weighed 200 pounds.

Private Bill backed off, apologized, saluted, and spoke the words that would put him into the history books. "Sir, he said as the water swirled around their ankles, "I have the honor to report that the ship has exploded and is sinking." We have only the testimony of the two men as to the truth of the incident; but it has always been reported this way, and other evidence indicates that Private Bill was just the sort of dutiful individual who would so execute his duty to the utmost. By today's standards his actions may seem rather ridiculously superfluous, but in those more straitlaced late-Victorian times, his devotion to duty would make him the idol of millions.

Its bow nearly amputated by the explosion, the *Maine* sank immediately. Of the 328 crew members, 260 were killed outright and many of the wounded died within the next few days. Perhaps it's easier to say that only 16 were left uninjured. Private Bill was counted among them, despite the fact that he received splinters in his face and through his hand from a lifeboat that disintegrated in the explosion. Despite his injuries, Bill climbed into one of the remaining boats and rowed around the ship in a hail of shrapnel and exploding ammunition, looking for floating survivors. There weren't many.

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(1) THE EVENING OF FEB 15 WAS

The evening of February 15 was oppressively warm and humid, at least if you were in Havana, Cuba. And that's where Bill Anthony found himself just then. Anthony was 44 years old and had been in the service for 28 years -- mostly in the Army, and now a private in the Marines. When I began to research Bill Anthony's story it struck me as odd that he was still a private after so many years of service. But it was pointed out to me that in those days promotions came slowly and there wasn't much opportunity for a private to distinguish himself.

And it must be said that Bill Anthony wasn't just any Marine private: he was the orderly to Captain Charles Sigsbee of the *USS Maine*, the first steel-hulled battleship ever built for the United States Navy.

During the Civil War the American Navy was probably the world's most innovative. It experimented with metal hulls, with guns in revolving turrets and with mastless vessels propelled by steam engines. But after 1865 the Navy fell into a long and unproductive sleep. It began to waken in the 1880s as a series of awkward incidents convinced the government that a stronger Navy was necessary. A good example occurred in 1891, when the US reached the brink of war with Chile, but had to back down because it was feared that the Chilean navy would easily overcome ours.

The US Navy stirred back to life with ships like the *Maine*. Launched in 1889 and commissioned in 1895 (everything moved slower in those days, it seems), the Maine measured 324 feet long, weighed 6700 tons, was manned by a crew of 328, and carried four imposing 10" bore guns in two revolving turrets.

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The *Maine* was in Havana harbor that sweltering night on what is charmingly - then and now - called a goodwill visit. Tensions between the US and Spain had been mounting for decades. Americans were disgusted and impatient with the decaying Spanish Empire's fumbling oppressions of the hapless - and rich - island of Cuba. Spaniards wished the Americans would mind their own business. It has to be said that there was a certain amount of profit motive in that American impatience. But it also has to be said that Cuba, then as now, was a mere 90 miles away, and that Spain's tactics weren't fun to watch. Without going into details, lets' just say that scorched earth tactics and concentration camps aren't 20th century inventions (they aren't Spanish inventions, either).

And so in January 1898 the *Maine* was sent to Havana to show the flag and to protect American citizens and interests. The imposing presence of the gleaming

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There were investigations, one by the Americans and other by the Spanish. Needless to say, they reached opposite conclusions. The Americans decided that the ship had been deliberately blown up by a mine or some other external cause. The Spanish felt that the ship had blown up from an internal cause: spontaneous combustion of coal or gunpowder, or perhaps those newfangled electric lights. President William McKinley exerted his considerable diplomatic skills to the utmost to avoid going to war. The fiery Theodore Roosevelt, soon to distinguish himself in Cuba, declared that McKinley had "no more backbone that a chocolate eclair." McKinley, the last Civil War veteran to occupy the White House, said simply, "I have been to war. I have seen bodies piled up. I don't want to see another."

McKinley's diplomatic efforts weren't enough, though, and war was declared in April. And what an odd war it was. The US Army wore its Civil War-era blue wool uniforms for the last time and carried rifles whose black powder cartridges produced clouds of smoke upon firing, thereby making them better targets for the tropic-uniformed Spanish soldiers using modern, clip-fed, smokeless powder firing Mauser rifles. Former Confederates peppered the thinly spread US officer corps. Perhaps the most flamboyant was the aptly nicknamed Brigadier General Joseph "Fighting Joe" Wheeler, who looked the part of a Confederate with his long white beard and floppy hat. Joe, like the Army, hadn't been to war for over thirty years, and at one point when the Spanish retreated he waved his hat and yelled, "C'mon boys - we've got the d--n Yankees on the run!"

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Florida. Probably just as well, though: on horseback they would've been all the better targets for those Mauser bullets, whose high-velocity zing echoed through the nightmares of veterans for years thereafter.

The war, in fact, was decided by two naval battles. Commodore George Dewey and his tiny fleet sailed into Manila Bay in the Philippines in May 1898, passing silent Spanish forts on Corregidor and Bataan that would not have their moments in history for another 44 years. Once inside the bay, Dewey found the decrepit Spanish fleet clustered at anchor in shallow water. That was the Spanish commander's choice: he said later that he wanted to give his sailors the best possible chance to escape when their vessels were sunk. Note his use of the word "when". In a hopelessly one-sided battle lasting a couple of hours and looking more like a target practice, the Americans utterly destroyed the Spanish fleet and inflicted numerous casualties while sustaining no ship losses and no fatalities of their own.

The decisive battle of the war, though, was probably the one fought off Santiago Bay, on the south shore of Cuba. A Spanish fleet under Admiral Pasqual Cervera had made its way across the Atlantic in May (and in the process, terrified the Eastern seaboard with thoughts of naval bombardment) and had holed up in the magnificently protected harbor. They were discovered and blockaded by an American fleet under Admiral William T. Sampson (namesake for the World War II Naval base on Seneca Lake). On Sunday, July 3, after a blockade of five weeks duration, a lookout on the battleship *Iowa* sighted columns of black smoke rising from inside the harbor (the harbor entrance was screened from direct view by cliffs and a twisting, curving channel). Under pressure from the US Army, the city of Santiago was about to surrender; and Cervera had received orders from his high command to give battle to the

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What little anyone knows today of the Spanish-American War usually centers around Theodore Roosevelt and his Rough Riders going up San Juan Hill. Actually they didn't go up San Juan Hill, and they didn't ride at all in Cuba: their horses got left behind in

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American fleet. The columns of smoke began to move toward the harbor entrance. The Spanish fleet was coming out.

An eyewitness on one of the American vessels wrote later of the awe-inspiring sight of the magnificent Spanish ships thread-

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in flames and hauled down their colors. The results were similar to those at Manila Bay: total destruction of the Spanish fleet, with heavy casualties. No American ships were lost or even significantly damaged. There was one American fatality. Amid all the carnage there were a few human torches. The captain of the battleship *Texas*, hearing his sailors exulting over another hit, admonished them: "Don't cheer, boys. The poor devils are dying." Admiral Cervera survived the battle. Brought aboard the gunboat *Gloucester*, he had no idea what to expect. He climbed the gangway and came face to face with, of all people, Lieutenant Richard Wainwright, once the executive officer of the doomed *Maine*. Wainwright shook his hand, congratulated him for a battle well fought, and invited him to lunch.

One Spanish vessel nearly escaped. Faster and in better condition than the others, it staged a race with the battleship *Oregon*, the fastest of the American vessels. For a solid hour the *Oregon* doggedly chased the Spanish ship, occasionally firing a ranging shot. Finally one of those shots landed ahead of the fleeing Spaniard, and its captain realized that the race was lost. He ordered the ship beached and its flag hauled down. In one of those odd coincidences that make history such great reading, it happened that the ship was cruiser *Cristoforo Colombo*, named for the man whose explorations helped start the Spanish Empire in the Western Hemisphere. And when the *Colombo's* colors came down, it marked the disappearance of the red-and-gold flag from this part of the world after 400 years of empire.

IN THE AFTERMATH, A GREAT MANY

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Pearl Harbor, simply lay in the mud of Havana Harbor for years after the war. The Cuban government balked at funding any salvage efforts, contending that an American vessel should be removed with American money. Finally in 1911, Congress appropriated enough to enable the Army Corps of Engineers to build a cofferdam around the wreck and pump out the water - a considerable engineering achievement for the time - and thereby allow for another investigation of the explosion. Not surprisingly, the 1911 American investigation reached the same conclusion as the 1898 American investigation. After the removal of more remains and mementoes, the wreck was refloated, towed out to deep water and sunk for the last time. What blew up the *Maine* will probably never be known for sure.

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flags went up, all of them the Stars and Stripes. The United States acquired Cuba, Puerto Rico, and some other scattered possessions (including Guam, whose Spanish contingent - unaware war had been declared - mistook the Navy's bombardment for a salute, and rowed out to apologize for not replying). In addition, the US paid Spain 209 million dollars for the Philippines despite the fact that President McKinley - among others - had no idea where the islands were, and someone had to bring in a globe and point them out to him. Interestingly, ultranationalist Theodore Roosevelt, who thought any place was better off under American rule, hesitated at acquiring the Phillippines. He worried that they would lead the US into war with Japan. In any event, the United States was out on the world stage, and a century later we're still out there.

The wreck of the *Maine*, unlike that of the honored *Arizona* at

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Apparently the US government had an unofficial "man in Havana" in 1898, an American businessman with many Cuban and Spanish contacts. In early February this man came to the American consul in Havana with a remarkable story. One of his contacts, a Spanish officer, had just come to see him and quite agitatedly had confessed that there was a plan to blow up the *Maine*. The Spaniard realized that it could cost his life if his treachery became known, but he could not in good conscience let the plan go forward. The American consul started the wheels turning, but they turned too slowly and 9:40 p.m. on February 15 came too soon.

If there was a plot to destroy the *Maine*, why has a century passed without any acknowledgment of that plot by the participants? Once again an interesting theory is offered. If the conspirators were Cuban or Spanish, they were also almost certainly Catholic. Not only is it a modern-day phenomenon for terrorists to publicly claim credit for their actions, but also those long-ago Catholic terrorists undoubtedly confessed their actions to a priest. The priest's vows bound him to silence, and so he would long since have taken the knowledge of the plot with him to the grave. Interesting. Maybe even true. Makes a good story, anyway.

We left Bill Anthony - remember Bill Anthony? - rowing desperately around the flaming wreck of the *Maine*. For the obvious lack of a ship to serve on, Bill was transferred to guard duty at the Brooklyn Navy Yard and incidentally was promoted to Sergeant Major - the highest enlisted rank in the Marine Corps - for his outstanding service during the

TRAGEDY. HIS EXTRAORDINARY DEVOTION TO DUTY BROUGHT HIM THE (1)

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family. And I guess we could stop here, but it wouldn't be the whole story.

"The Red, White, and Blue" soon closed. Having just recently witnessed the war itself, the public was not interested in reenactments. Bill was now out of work and really hadn't much in the pipeline. He had resigned from the Marine Corps three months short of thirty years' service, which would have meant a tidy $50/month pension. And he was reluctant to reenlist for fear that he might be sent to the Phillippines, where the bloody Insurrection was now in full swing. Caught between the needs of a family and the apparent inability to meet those needs, Bill became desperate. For a while in the fall of 1899 he found himself picking grapes in his in-law's vineyard in Guyanoga, which was quite a change of situation for someone who had been acclaimed as a war hero hardly more than a year before.

But the grape harvest was soon over with, and Bill was idle again. Leaving his wife and son with her parents in Guyanoga, he wandered back to New York City to see if he could rustle up any gainful employment. Unwilling to pull any strings or even mention his plight, and frankly lacking much of anything in the way of marketable skills, Bill had no success.

On a chilly November 24, 1898, two police officers patrolling Central Park noticed a man sitting on one of the benches and acting rather strangely. Now this alone would be all in a day's work for a cop in Central park. But the bench's occupant was a tall, distinguished-looking man with a handlebar mustache; and were it not for his agitated behavior he would have attracted only favorable attention.

Suddenly the man on the bench fished in a pocket and pulled out a little glass bottle, uncorked it, and swallowed the contents at a gulp. The police moved in. The man struggled with them, protesting that he didn't want to be saved. And despite the best efforts of all involved, he wasn't. He died within the hour of an

OVERDOSE OF COCAINE EXTRACT. BY THEN (3)

Bill Anthony (4) (6)

away his reliable hierarchy of duties and put him out in a world in which he had few marketable skills.

As happens with even the most remarkable events and people, these were soon forgotten in most quarters. No one thought to invite Adella Anthony to the launch of the second USS *Maine*, in July 1901, but she found out about it and came anyway. She sat quietly, surrounded by dignitaries who wondered vaguely who she was, until the ship slid down the ways and splashed into the water. At that point Mrs. Anthony emitted an involuntary shout of delight and then, embarrassed, explained who she was. It was then the Nary's turn to be embarrassed.

The Navy's memory actually improved over the years. In 1942 inquiries were made as to whether Bill Anthony had any female descendants who could christen a ship. In the meantime Adella Anthony had moved back to Yates

COUNTY; AND WILLIAM ANTHONY (5)

old battleship *Maine*. And when it was commissioned, the *Anthony* saw service - as Theodore Roosevelt had feared decades before - fighting the Japanese in the Philippines.

But some never forgot at all. William Anthony Junior, who of course never even knew his father, nonetheless kept over his desk, for as far back as his daughters could remember, a picture of the ill-fated battleship *Maine*.

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tragedy. His extraordinary devotion to duty brought him the proverbial fifteen minutes of fame, and it brought a number of new possibilities his way as well.

Undoubtedly looking to cash in on his fame, a group of promoters approached Bill to persuade him to take a part in their play about the recently concluded war, aptly if unimaginatively titled "The Red, White, and Blue." The promise of cash far beyond a sergeant major's dreams - and perhaps some fear for his apparently failing eyesight - convinced Bill to join the troupe. His part, such as it was, was not particularly demanding. It consisted entirely of Bill appearing on stage in his uniform, waving a flag, and intoning "Remember the Maine!" The nation's most famous sergeant major, tall and imposing with his uniform and his handlebar mustache, brought thunderous cheers from the audiences.

Another possibility came Bills' way, this one more modest but - as it turned out - more substantial than the play. It was a letter from a young lady, oddly enough a native of a tiny county in upstate New York's Finger Lakes, simply asking for Bill's autograph. Now by this time Bill Anthony had received a great many letters asking for his autograph, but Adella Blancet's letter somehow stood out from the rest. He wrote back at some length.

As you may have guessed already, Bill and Adella were married in November 1898. Their son William Junior was born in July 1899.

It would be pleasant to be able to end Bill Anthony's's story here, as he enjoyed the rewards of duty, fame, and a happy marriage and

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overdose of cocaine extract. By then his identity had been established, to the shock of all who learned of the incident.

A recent article in *Smithsonian* magazine called Bill Anthony "the *Maine's* last casualty", and that may not be far off the mark. As with the ship itself, the cause of Bill Anthony's loss may never be known for sure. What is known is this: that while the destruction of the *Maine* brought new opportunities and responsibilities in the way of fame and family, it took

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county, and William Anthony Junior had grown up there, married, and was a successful farmer, vineyardist, and supervisor of the town of Torrey, where he resided on the road that still bears his last name. He also had had two daughters, who in December 1942 skipped some school at Penn Yan Academy to go up to the Bath Iron Works in Maine to christen the *USS Anthony*, a destroyer named for their grandfather. Interestingly, the *Anthony*, at 376 feet in length, was larger than the

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