



# HERSCHER AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

## SUPPLEMENTAL NEWSLETTER #12

### JANUARY 2023

*"from past generations to future generations"*

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## THE CHATFIELD HOUSE

By Bob Voss

If you are thinking that you remember something about this, you would be right. I talked about in Supplemental Newsletter #5. Take a look at this picture, you should recognize it. It is along Rte 17 in Section 1 of Pilot Township. It is owned by Marvin Dahn (deceased). Over the past few years, it has fallen in disrepair.



The house was built by Nathan Chatfield and completed in 1860. This would make it one of the oldest houses in County West. It had a full basement that had to be hand dug before the walls could be erected. The walls consisted of hand-quarried stone hauled by wagon from the Wiley's Creek area nearly eight miles north of the building site. The massive outer walls taper from 22 inches at the base to 18 inches at the roof beams. The upstairs area would hold four bedrooms and the downstairs area held two bedrooms, a living room, a sitting room and a bath. This house was also used as a country schoolroom.

Anyway, I told you all of that. But now I would like you to hear about Edward Chatfield the son of Nathan and Margaret Chatfield who lived in this house so very long ago. The following is a portrayal of Edward that was done by Will Rezba at a program presented by the HAHS on Sunday, November 15, 2015.

Hello. My name is Edward Chatfield and I am a Union soldier. You know my folks, Nathan and Margaret, they live over there (motioning to the north) in Section 1 of this township. The house is on now what is Rte 17 and is owned by Marvin Dahn. You have probably passed by there a hundred times and didn't know all this. Well, now you know. And now, I have a story to tell all of you.

My family came to Pilot Township in 1859 from Ohio having bought 172 acres in Section 1. Section 1 is in the northeast corner of Pilot Township. Dad built the stone house that still stands in 1860. I was 18 years old at the time and with me being the oldest of the five sons, I had to work hard to help my dad with the farming and taking care of the cows. I also taught school in the upstairs of that house. Pilot Township was just getting started and the schools hadn't been built yet. Ya know, some of those farm boys were bigger than me and discipline was a problem. I'm glad I didn't have to teach very long. I was a farmer not a teacher.

Those times were hard, but we all pitched in to made the farm work. We had been reading about the troubling times in the country and that some southern states were talking of succession and all. Something about states rights. And they sure weren't kidding. Did you know that they were called the Confederate States of America and actually fired on Ft. Sumter which they tell me is in Charleston, South Carolina. That was on April 12, 1861. You just had to know that wasn't going to set well and it was surely going to lead into something not so good.

Well, our President, Abraham Lincoln, was sworn to protect the Union, and he put out a call for 75,000 men to put down this here rebellion. His home state being Illinois and all meant that Illinois should set the example in volunteering. No one thought a war would last long, but a fellow by the name of General Winfield Scott advised the President that it could be a long war. So the guys in the county started volunteering and joining up in the 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment.

By 1861, I was nearly 19 years old. With all the work I had been doing around the farm, I had developed lots of muscles and could whip the best of them. I was certainly not afraid to fight nor was I about to shirk my responsibility. I wanted to serve President Lincoln's call, but my folks said I needed to wait. "Wait for what?" After all, my brothers could help my dad with the farming. While I was waiting, another batch of Kankakee County boys joined the 42<sup>nd</sup> Illinois Infantry.

Yes, I had seen the death numbers in the papers and I was just as stunned as everyone else. There had already been major battles at Fort Henry, Fort Donelson, and Shiloh and lots of our boys had been killed. Enlistments had slowed way down –can you imagine that? The President said that if 300,000, three-year volunteers could not be raised that he would consider a draft.

OK, enough is enough. I was not going to be labeled a coward. I just had to enlist no matter what the folks thought. This I did on August 5, 1862 in Kankakee. Us new recruits trained at the Kankakee Fair Grounds also known as Camp Worcester. This is now the site of Old Fair Park. Why, they even let our parents come visit us in the evenings. That wasn't so bad. But that didn't last long and we were off to Camp Douglas up there in Chicago. And then on October 1, 1862, me and my buddies were mustered into Company "B" of the 113<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry Regiment and I had just turned 20. Why they even let my mother witness the ceremony. The speaker reassured all of the mothers in attendance that the rebellion would be crushed in 60 days. Wow! Only 60 days. How bad could it be?

I started keeping a diary about this time and tried daily to write down my experiences as a Union soldier. I wrote my folks and family often and would you believe it but that some distant relative found my diary and letters in an old shoebox in 1964. They ended up even writing a book about my experience that I had written in that diary and what I had said in my letters home. What do you think about that?

We spent a month at Camp Douglas guarding a bunch of confederate prisoners. They didn't seem to be such bad guys but they sure did talk funny. We also bought newly issued Union stationery to write home on if there would be any time. The verse imprinted on the stationery read:

*We are coming, Father Abraham, Six hundred thousand more,  
From Mississippi's winding stream, And from New England's shore,  
We leave our ploughs and workshops,  
Our wives and children dear, With hearts too full for utterance,  
With but a silent tear.  
We will not look behind us, But steadfastly before,  
We are coming, Father Abraham, Six hundred thousand more!*

While at Camp Douglas, we were issued \$40, an 1861 Springfield rifle musket, ammunition and a dress uniform. We were ready to go. But where were we headed. I am sure someone knew and we were surely going to find out.

It turned out that on November 6, 1862, we did head out, out by train to Cairo, Illinois. Cairo was a gathering place for the armies heading south. And from Cairo, it was on to Memphis. And from Memphis, it was off to the war.

I am not going to sit here and bore you about all of the battles us boys in the 113<sup>th</sup> were involved in. But broadly it was the Central Mississippi Campaign, Vicksburg, Battle of Chickasaw Bayou, and Battle of Arkansas Post which is near Vicksburg. The Battle at Arkansas Post on January 9, 1863, was where I was struck by a rifle shot in my side and then wouldn't you know it, but I got hit again in my right leg. Good thing that Johnny Reb wasn't a better shot or I would have

had a mini-ball in my body somewhere. Getting hit in the body most anywhere with a mini-ball was sure death and getting hit in the leg meant sure amputation. I was sore for a while after that but I lived. One good thing though, we took 8,000 prisoners who had Enfield rifles. Note that I said they **had** Enfield rifles! Now **we had** Enfield rifles. The Enfields were much better than the Springfields that we were issued and we were glad to get them.

Then, wouldn't you know it, but I got myself captured of all things - me along with 85 other boys from the 113<sup>th</sup>. That was on June 10, 1864 at the Battle of Brice Cross Roads, which is near Baldwyn, Mississippi. Boy, how I missed Mom, Dad and the family back home. Well, do you know what the Johnny Rebs do with Union prisoners? They ship you off you to the prison camp in Andersonville, Georgia, that's what they do. Me along with a train loaded with other Union prisoners reached Andersonville on Sunday afternoon, June 19, 1864. A little, crackling voice 15 year old Reb with his finger tight on the trigger, greeted us captives. And you know what that Reb had the gall to say to us, he said "This here's Andersonville boys, your last stop" I never wanted to smack someone as bad as I did that little squirt. I ended up spending 106 long days in that awful place. Meanwhile, the war went on and I missed home something fierce.

Whatever you may have heard about Andersonville, it is much worse and I cannot fully describe the horrors we endured there. I can tell you that there was many a lad who died there, 12,912 to be exact. Those boys died of disease, poor sanitation, malnutrition, overcrowding, and exposure to the elements. And the commander of the camp, what a hateful, pitiful, no good schmuck named Henry Wirz. Did you know that they hung him after the war for his treatment of prisoners? Served him right.

General Sherman was making his way through the South on his March to the Sea about that time and the Rebs did not want to get caught with a place like Andersonville. So they started shipping prisoners elsewhere. They promised about 4,000 of us an exchange for some Reb prisoners from up north. We were headed for Charleston, South Carolina where we would be shipped north, or so they said. But it was all a stinking lie; they were really sending us to another prisoner of war camp in Millen, Georgia. Dang the rebs.

But being smarter than your average Reb, I managed to escape on February 19, 1865 and was picked up a few days later by Union soldiers. By this time, I weighed 100 pounds soaking wet, my uniform was tattered and dirty, my body was beset with vermin, my hair and beard were tangled and filthy, and I stunk, I stunk really bad.. It would have been difficult for even Mom to recognize me looking like this. But do you know what, I was alive – barely but alive. Then it really was off to Annapolis where I was to be sent home. Yes home. I could not wait to see my folks and brothers and sister.

I was in bad shape and had to stop along the way at a hospital. After that, I stopped in Ohio at my Grandmothers house. She was so glad to see me. I brought her with me the rest of the way and we arrived in Pilot Township on April 18, 1865. And Oh such a time of rejoicing we had. I did learn that my brother David had died during my days at Andersonville at the age of 18. I sure miss him. President Lincoln had been shot on April 14 by that dirty dog reb John Wilkes Booth. He got his.

Now the war is over. What were they saying about it being done in 60 days? General Robert E. Lee surrendered his army to General Ulysses S. Grant on April 9, 1865. Some of the rebs down south wanted to drag the war out, but they gave it up about a month later.

I lost a lot of good friends that had died in that war. Most of the guys that died actually died of some sort of nasty disease. Some I never even heard of. But they tell me that typhoid, pneumonia, measles, tuberculosis, and malaria got the most of them.

I bet you think that this is end of this story? Well, if you muster into a regiment you dang sure have to get yourself mustered out. To do that I had to get myself down to Memphis, again, to get myself mustered out. This I did on June 20, 1865. Now its over.

Edward Chatfield moved to Colorado in 1879.