



HERSCHER AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

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OUR BOYS IN BLUE

By Bob Voss

I am currently re-reading a book called "Confederates in the Attic" written by Tony Horwitz. Tony traveled through the south and actually did reenactments of Civil War battles dressed as a Confederate soldier. He also visited many southern towns and cities and found that the Civil War is only half over. Some towns still celebrate General Robert E. Lee's and General Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson's birthdays.

One thing he noted was that a lot of people in the South can trace their ancestry back to a Confederate soldier and they are very proud of these soldiers. But here in the north, most of us can't trace our ancestry back to the Civil War. Many Northerners families had immigrated to the US well after 1865. That is not saying that some families don't have a Union soldier in their lineage. This is the case of Ron Shank's great great grandfather Thomas Eggman who was with Co. H, 23rd Indiana Infantry.

So maybe we should be proud of our Union Civil War veterans just as they do in the South. There are many of these veterans in the cemeteries in Kankakee County West. I thought you may be interested in those 11 veterans who are buried at Pilot Center Cemetery. Let me introduce you to these brave men who helped preserve the Union:

- Gunner Gunnerson
- Thor Thorson
- William Huntington James
- Frederick Herscher
- Austin W. Ewing
- Eben Hills
- John R. Griffin
- Harmon Mead
- Eugene S. Comstock
- Truair Comstock
- William S. Woods

Gunner Gunnerson

Pilot Center Cemetery
Company F, 36th Illinois Infantry

Gunner Gunnerson was born on September 20, 1840 and immigrated with his parents to the United States in 1846. In the 1860 census, Gunner was located in LaSalle County, IL and was listed as a farm laborer..

Gunner enlisted in Company F of the 36th Illinois Infantry on August 20, 1861. The 36th IL Infantry originated in Aurora, IL. Gunner was mustered out October 8, 1865 at the rank of Sergeant.

In 1867, Gunner married Flora Christian (1850-1900). They had three children: Bertie Grant (1868-), William C.(1873-1946), and Clifford (1885-1908).

Sometime between 1867 and 1870, the Gunnerson's made their way to Pilot Township. Gunner bought 160 acres in Section 26 from the Illinois Central for \$8 per acre. With that much land, the Gunnerson's must have been very busy and led the life of farming until close to 1900.

In the 1900 census, we find Gunner living in Bloomington, Indiana. He must have lived out his days there until his death on March 31, 1915 at the age of 59. He must have been moved from Bloomington to his resting place with his wife at Pilot Center Cemetery. Their son Clifford is also buried at Pilot Center.



Thor Thorson

Pilot Center Cemetery
Company D, 36th Illinois Infantry

Thor Thorson was born on September 17, 1840 in Norway. He was the son of Thor (1804-1880) and Inger Badde (1805-1888). The Thorson's immigrated to the United States in 1847 and settled in Kendall County Illinois. Thor spent his early years living in Kendall and Grundy counties.

Thor enlisted in Company D of the 36th Illinois Infantry on July 15 1861. During his Civil War days, Thor participated in the battles of Pea Ridge, Corinth, Stone River, Lookout Mountain, Perryville, Murfreesboro, Chattanooga, Mission Ridge, Resaca, and Kennesaw Mountain. Thor was mustered out on 1/25/1864 and then re-enlisted as a veteran. He was discharged on 6/19/1865 with a disability.

The following was taken from the History of the Thirty Sixth IL. Infantry:
Apparently the 36th was in a battle and "as Company D advanced through the thick brush, an order was heard "right and left forward", which proved to be from the Rebel side; but the lines being so near together, both obeyed, and were brought face to face- only their number were three to one of ours. Picking their men, they fired and then fell back a little way. Thor Thorson confronted an officer and four men. They called to him to surrender. "Not with a loaded gun" said he, and fired at the officer. Noticing as he ran that the men aimed low, he leaped up as they fired, escaping all the bullets but one, which wounded him in the thigh, but not so as to hinder his getting away. The officer was afterward found dead." This happened on June 9, 1864.

In 1869, Thor married Caroline Nelson (1850-1933) in Chebanse, IL. So somewhere between the end of the war and 1869, Thor ended up in Kankakee County. The Thors' had six children: Mary (1870-), George Lester (1873-1936), Elnora (1876-1904), Della (1879-1915), Lida (1882-1933), and Lillian (1882-1967).

Thor came to Pilot Township in 1869 and rented 301 acres of land in Section 6 of Township 29 where he carried on farming quite successfully. His wife owned 66 acres in that section also. Thor must have been very busy keeping up with that amount of acreage.

Thor died on November 23, 1904 at the age of 64 and is buried at Pilot Center Cemetery. Buried alongside him are Caroline (1933), Della Wadleigh (1915), Elnora (1904), George (1936) and Lida Yeager (1933).

There are no direct descendents that could be found.

William Huntington James

Pilot Center Cemetery
Company A, 9th Illinois Calvary

William Huntington James was born on June 17, 1829 at Chepstow, Monmouthshire, Wales and was the son of William and Mary. Young William must have been an adventuresome youth having run away at the age of 12 as a cabin boy. He spent 20 years on the high seas, traveling around the world and eventually owning his own ship. He came to Louisiana in 1842, and a few years later he fought in the Mexican War (1846-1848) on both land and sea, receiving a saber wound on the chin. He continued sailing the Great Lakes until he retired from the sea in 1860 and bought a farm in Pilot Township. He had accomplished all of this at the ripe old age of 31.

In 1851, William found time to marry Lodwema Coy in Ohio. The James' had eight children: Mary (1857-), Oliver James (1861), Huntington (1863-1947), Edith L. (1867-), William H. (1871-), Addie (1873), and Clarence L. (1875-1901). Lodema died in 1873 and later William married Anna Lesch.

The adventuresome spirit must have stuck with William because on February 23, 1865, he enlisted in Company A of the 9th Illinois Calvary. This was near the end of the war and he was mustered out on October 21, 1865. At that time, he had three children.

Between 1865 and 1883, William was engaged in farming. He then moved his family to Herscher in 1883. William would have been 54 at that time. In Herscher, William operated a lumber and coal business with his son Huntington.

William also found time to be postmaster in Herscher from 1893 to 1897.

William Huntington James died on March 20, 1900 and is buried at Pilot Center Cemetery along side Lodwema (1887) and Clarence (1901)



William H. James

Frederick Herscher

Pilot Center Cemetery
1st Regiment New York Marine Artillery

Frederick was the son of Andre Herscher (1792-1846) and Catherine Walch (1804-1877) and was born on October 17, 1839 in Alsace, France. Frederick immigrated to the United States in 1851 and did farm work until his enlistment.

We know little of Frederick's Civil War experience other than he enlisted in the 1st Regiment of the New York Marine Artillery. He was wounded in battle and discharged after recovering in a hospital in the south. On his way back home, he stopped to pick apples in Missouri and met Emilia Falkenbury. He promised to return for her, which he did after starting his own farm in Pilot Township.

In 1867, Frederick married Emilia E. (Millie) Falkenbury (1846-1936). They had six children: William (1867-1942), John (1871-1872) Charles (1873-1953), Mary Isabella (1875-1938), Henry (1877-1967), and Martha Elizabeth (1882-1968).

In addition to administering to his brother John's properties, Frederick operated a furniture store. He also served on the Village Board and Pilot Township Board.

Frederick died on October 15, 1907 at the age of 67 and is buried at Pilot Center Cemetery.

Descendent: Frederick's great granddaughter is Judy Golembiewski of Kankakee.



Austin W. Ewing

Pilot Center Cemetery Company H, 13th Illinois Infantry

Austin W. Ewing was the son of James Ewing (1801-1880) and Sarah Park (1790-1880) and was born on 12/7/1836 in Ligonier, Pennsylvania.

The 1850 census has the Ewing family living in Ligonier, Pennsylvania. The 1860 census has the Ewing's living in Kendall County, Illinois. Austin must have helped his father with the farming along with his two brothers and three sisters.

Austin enlisted in Company H of the 13th Illinois Infantry (Kane Co.) on 3/11/1862. He did not serve long as he suffered a hernia and was discharged on 8/3/1862. The 13th Illinois Infantry were engaged in the battles of Vicksburg, Lookout Mountain, and Missionary Ridge.

On March 12, 1863, Austin married Susan Melvina Smith (1842-1902) in Kendall County, Illinois. They had eight children: Clarence (1864-1870), Henry (1866-), Nelson Park (1870-1942), Sadie Elizabeth (1871-1935), Julia (1873-1920), Walter B. (1876-1934), Eva (1878-1950), Mabel (1881-1936)

After the war, the Ewing's made their way to Pilot Township sometime before 1870 (census) and farmed in Pilot Township.

Austin died on September 2, 1899 at the age of 62 and is buried at Pilot Center Cemetery next to Susan (wife). From a death notice in the Kankakee Daily Gazette: DEATH AT HERSCHER. Austin Ewing died Saturday night. He was an old soldier and had been a sufferer most of the time since his discharge from diseases contracted while in the field. The funeral took place today (9/4/1899).

Descendent: Austin's daughter Eva (married to Henry Herscher) is the grandmother of Judy Golembiewski who lives in Kankakee.



Eben Hills

Pilot Center Cemetery
Company E, 91st Illinois Infantry

Eben Hills was the son of Eben Miles Hills (1801-1859) and Stella Sears (1806-1884) and was born on November 13, 1843 in Lisbon (Kendall Co.), Illinois.

Both the 1850 and 1860 census's show Eben living with his parents and siblings in Big Grove, IL (Kendall County)

Eben enlisted in Company E of the 91st Illinois Infantry on September 8, 1862 at Camp Butler, IL and was mustered out on July 12, 1865. The 91st was assigned to garrison and guard duty. They also saw action at Fort Bakley, Alabama on April 2-9 1865, which is one of the last engagements of the war.

On December 3, 1866, Eben married Phila Bushnell (1844-1919) in Kendall County, Illinois. They had three children: Lillian Matilda (1867-1919), Susanne (1874-), and Hubert Bennett (1881-1965).

The 1880 Pilot Township census has the Hills living in Pilot Township. So sometime between 1866 and 1880, the Hills found their way to Pilot Township. The census lists Eben as a farmer.

The June 1, 1900 census has the Hills living in Milks Grove Township, Illinois and Eben listed at a farmer.

Eben died on April 7, 1916 at the age of 72 and is buried at Pilot Center Cemetery next to Phila (wife).



John R. Griffin

Pilot Center Cemetery
4th Illinois Calvary

John R. Griffin was the son of Ezikel Griffin and Manda Reed and was born on February 3, 1846 in Pennsylvania.

John enlisted in the 4th Illinois Calvary on October 4, 1864 and was mustered out on October 9, 1865.

In 1867, John married Mary Jane Fender (1842-1934) and had two children: Inez L. (1873-) and Ida L. (1876-).

John and Mary lived in Chicago and it appears that John was a blacksmith. Sometime prior to 1910, the Griffin's found their way to Herscher. The 1910 census indicates he was a blacksmith.

On May 17, 1917, one of the largest events in Herscher up until then was held with 3,500 people honoring the men who enlisted in the civil war. The parade of 800-1,000 people started at 7 p.m., with Carle Parker as grand marshal, leading the parade with Herscher band. Honored guests in an automobile next to the band were Richard Duckworth and John Griffin, Herscher's only surviving Civil War Veterans. Capt. Burns and 52 men from Co. L marched. The Boy Scouts, Red Cross, and Herscher Commercial Association (forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce) joined the parade. The parade ended at Stevens Hall (later known as the American Legion Hall). There were so many people that the hall held only a fifth of the crowd. An additional program was given in the street. Mayor C.J. Winder introduced Mr. Duckworth and speakers Capt. Burns, Sgt. Nickerson, and O.C. Eckley. There were more speeches and music and a supper was presented by the Red Cross (from County West Companion page 332).

John R. Griffin died on May 9, 1924 at the age of 72 and is buried at Pilot Center Cemetery next to Mary Jane.



Harmon Mead

Pilot Center Cemetery
Company G, 8th Illinois Infantry

Harmon Mead was the son of Caesar Augustus Mead (1790-1868) and Mary Gove (1807-1844) and was born on March 15, 1833 in Vermont. The Mead family was farmers and Harmon had seven siblings according to the 1850 census.

There are no records indicating what Harmon did during the years of 1850 to 1864.

Harmon was drafted into Company G of the 8th Illinois Infantry on October 19, 1864 and was mustered out on August 22, 1865. This is what his service records indicate but his military stone has the 9th Illinois Infantry on it.

Harmon married Elizabeth A. Woods (1842-1902). They had four children: Dolman (1871-), Roy Herbert (1874-1942), George (1874-), and Emory John (1879-)

After the war, the Mead's made their way to Pilot Township sometime before 1870 (they are listed in the Pilot Township census 7/31/1870) and farmed in Pilot Township.

Harmon died on January 17, 1899 at the age of 65 and is buried at Pilot Center Cemetery next to Elizabeth.



Eugene S. Comstock

Pilot Center Cemetery
Company A, 9th Illinois Calvary

Eugene Comstock was the son of Samuel Comstock (1809-1867) and Sara Throwbridge (1808-1879). Eugene was born in 1841 in Tully, New York. The family found their way to Pilot Township in 1856.

In 1863, Eugene married Luzene Maria Miller (1845-1873). They had three children: Arletta (1865-1956), Truair (1868-), and Galen (1870-1871). After the death of Luzene, Eugene married Henrietta Sammons in 1874.

Eugene enlisted in Company A of the 9th Illinois Calvary on 2/23/1865. The end of the war sees Eugene in Mississippi and Alabama as a clerk to the Provost Marshall. There he administered the amnesty oath to large numbers of ex-confederate soldiers. The 9th Illinois was mustered out on 10/31/1865.

After the war, Eugene farmed in Pilot Township until 1867 at which time he moved the family to Wisconsin for a year. They however decided to return to Pilot Township in 1868 where Eugene bought 80 acres in Section 30 for \$10/acre. That land was sold in 1892, and Eugene with his son Truair went into the hardware business in Herscher.

At the Township level, Eugene served as Commissioner of Highways, Trustee, and Supervisor. His political career continued at the Town level as mayor of Herscher from 1896 to 1899.

Eugene died on May 5, 1915 and is buried at Pilot Center Cemetery next to his second wife Henrietta (1918)

Descendent: Eugene's daughter Arletta is Ludie Wadliegh's grandmother.



Eugene Comstock

Truair Comstock

Pilot Center Cemetery
1st Illinois Light Artillery Battery I

Truair Comstock was the son of Samuel Comstock (1809-1867) and Sarah Trowbridge (1808-1878) and in 1844 in New York. Truair is a brother of Eugene who also served in the war.

The family farmed in New York before coming to Pilot Township in 1856. They went through a lot of hardships and illness in this wilderness, but they made their farm work.

Truair enlisted in the 1st Illinois Light Artillery Battery I on February 9, 1862. We don't know for certain how he died in 1865 but one account says that he died of a disease while being a soldier. It is not certain if he is actually buried at Pilot but may be buried in a faraway battlefield cemetery.

Truair died at the age of 21 but would have had an adventuresome life.



William S. Woods

Pilot Center Cemetery
138th Illinois Infantry Company A

We know very little about William S. Woods. We do know that William was born in 1832 in Pennsylvania.

We think that this is William S. Woods who enlisted for a 100 day tour in the 138th Illinois Infantry. He enlisted in Monmouth, IL on 6/21/1864. This is all that could be found on his military background.

The 1870 Pilot Township census shows William as a farm labor living with the family of Harmon Mead. It just happens that Harmon is a Civil War veteran. We speculate that Harmon and William met during the Civil War and may have been friends. They may have kept in touch after the War and Harmon invited him to come to Pilot Township to work for him. And William is buried in a lot owned by Harmon Mead having died in 1906.

This is thin at best, but this coupled with the American Legion's list of Civil War veterans at Pilot Center should make for a good case.

