

President's Message

by Brenda Leyndyke

President's Letter-January 2016

Dear Friends of Calhoun County
Genealogical Society,

Happy New Year!

The New Year brings new energy to my family history research. I hope it does for you too. Recently, I was looking at the first record I ever found when starting my research. It was a World War I draft registration for my grandfather. The date I printed the record was 31 January 2007. I can't believe it has been nine years.

I remember the excitement of finding that one record. My love of genealogy started that day. I knew nothing about how to research my family tree. I remember going to the library to look for books on how to get started. I was hungry for information.

I hope you are hungry for information as well. Our January meeting is titled, "Beginning Genealogy", but it is for all researchers, no matter what stage of your research you are in. Although, I have been researching for nine years, there are still things I learn that helps my research. I hope you will join us for this informative program. Please invite others that you think would like to learn about genealogy. It should be a great meeting.

Our November meeting where we toured Fort Custer Historical Society museum was a great success. So great, that we offered a second tour night in December. If you haven't been to the museum, you need to. It is a great resource in our area.

The board's attention will be turning to programs for the next year soon. If you know of a program topic you would like to

see presented, please let any board member know, or email me at brae957@gmail.com. If you would like to be a presenter, we would love to have you, just let us know. Lastly, starting with our January 26th meeting CCGS volunteers will begin offering research help to members before our monthly meetings. More information is available in this newsletter.

Happy Ancestral Hunting in 2016,



Research Assistance Provided Before CCGS Meetings

Beginning with the January 26, 2016 meeting, the CCGS board will be available to help people with their research. This assistance will be available on a first come, first serve basis starting at 6 p.m. Board members will be available until 6:45 p.m. to answer your questions, provide tips to further your research and to help you if you are just starting out researching your family. The board will not be available to conduct research for you, but to help you with the next steps in your research. No matter if you are a beginner who doesn't have a clue what to do, or an experienced researcher who is stumped, bring your questions and we will do our best to help you.

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Calhoun County Genealogical Society

The purposes of the Calhoun County Genealogical Society (CCGS) are:

- To gather and preserve information of genealogical value.
- To encourage the deposit of such information in suitable depositories.
- To aid genealogists in the study of family history through the exchange of knowledge.
- To publish and promote Calhoun County and other genealogical materials.



CCGS is a nonprofit organization recognized as tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue code. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent provided by law. Individuals, libraries or societies may join. Annual dues for the year, beginning September 1, are \$18 for members choosing to receive **Generations** through postal mail or \$15 for members electing to receive the newsletter via e-mail. Memberships are accepted year-round; dues received after May 1 will pay for the following year's membership. Members receive **Generations** newsletter six times per year. All are invited to submit articles to the **Generations** editor. Permission is granted to reprint articles unless otherwise noted. Please give appropriate credit to the source. Copies of pages from back issues of **Generations** are available for \$1.00 for the first page and \$.50 for each additional page. General meetings are held at 7 p.m. the fourth Tuesday of each month at the LDS Marshall Branch Church 16036 Old US -27, Marshall, *unless otherwise specified*. No meetings are held in July, August or December. Programs are free and open to the public.

President

Brenda Leyndyke

(269) 275-0462 • brae957@gmail.com

Vice President

Open

Recording Secretary

Darlene Stange

(269) 965-7671 • suzydoll51@gmail.com

Corresponding Secretary

Stephanie Tobolski

(269) 964-2592 • stofbc-roots@yahoo.com

Treasurer

Arthur Adams

(269) 781-8019 • acadams@aol.com

Past President

Alex VanZanten

(269) 979-4393 • alexvz47@msn.com

Programs and Publicity Committee Chair

Open

Membership Promotion Committee Chair

Marcie Telfer

(269) 963-3899 • matelfer@comcast.net

Records Preservation Committee Chair

Open

Publication Committee Chair

Open

Cemetery Transcriptions Committee Chair

and Pioneer Certificates Committee Chair

James N. Jackson

(269) 288-1655 • jjacks01@yahoo.com

Generations Newsletter Editor

Jan Goodson

(269) 962-5604 • janice.goodson@omega-link.com

Hospitality Committee Chair

Alex VanZanten

(269) 979-4393 • alexvz47@msn.com

Research Committee Chair

Chelsea Johnson

(810) 923-5627 • cjohnson27@gmail.com

Nominating Committee Chair

Open

Website Committee Chair

James N. Jackson

(269) 288-1655 • jjacks01@yahoo.com

Michigan Genealogical Council Delegates

Brenda Leyndyke

(269) 275-0462 • brae957@gmail.com

and

Chelsea Johnson

(810) 923-5627 • cjohnson27@gmail.com

Calhoun County Genealogical Society

PO Box 879, Marshall MI 49068-0879 • MichiganCalhounGene@yahoo.com • <http://www.rootsweb.com/~micalhou/ccgs.htm>

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PART 1: Memoirs of Sheldon R. Curtiss (Great-grandfather of Art Adams)

As Dictated to his Daughter, Evelyn Curtiss Lowrey, December 1, 1920

In my sketch of "When Berlin and I Were Young" I told of meeting the beautiful girl in the old log school house at Berlin Center. She came with her parents from New Albion, New York, about one and a half years after we came from Ohio. Her name was Abigail Barnard, daughter of James and Elizabeth Barnard. We were married when I was twenty-one and she was nine months younger, and we settled in a little home south of Berlin Center, Ionia County, Michigan. In this home our oldest child, Rosalia Elizabeth was born.

My first vote was cast for Abraham Lincoln in 1860. In 1862 he called for volunteers and I soon enlisted. We young soldiers sang in those days, "We are coming father Abraham, 300,000 strong." Our flag had been fired upon at Fort Sumter. The leaders of the Confederacy had endeavored to trail our flag in the dust and if we had consented to this our Country would have been divided against itself. We felt that duty demanded us to defend our Country in this terrible Civil War. It meant more than we can express to leave home and our precious family and take up arms against our countrymen in the Southland. Lincoln had seen the awful curse of slavery and when he saw the poor victims tied to the whipping posts and whipped until the blood streamed down their backs he said, "If I ever get a chance I will strike that thing a blow and I will strike hard. Slavery was one of the worst curses that ever existed in this country. Families were divided, sold and separated. Very often the beastly master was father of his own slaves and like Legree in "Uncle Tom's Cabin," gloried in their shame.

While I am sorry I ever had to take a part in the terrible curse of war, I am glad I was one who helped Lincoln to strike slavery it's deadly blow, and also to preserve our own United States and uphold the honor of Old Glory.

Soon after I enlisted I, with others, was ordered to go to Grand Rapids encampment, which was on the old fair grounds east of the city. Here, we and our horses learned the drill, which consisted of right and left swing with our horses, by company, jumping fences and ditches on horseback, bugle calls and guard duty.

Here I received my first wound. While jumping the ditch with my horse, a large wart on my thumb joint caught in the button of my waistcoat and tore the wart out by the roots. It being the fall of the year, I took cold in the wound and had quite a serious time, and this lasted me all winter. Our guard duty consisted of guarding the camp of fifth, sixth, and seventh Michigan Cavalry, which afterwards became what is known as Custer's famous Michigan Cavalry Brigade.

One morning, while guarding the guard house, I had quite an exciting experience with some fellows who had been brought in by the patrol guard during the night. These fellows were filled up with whiskey and were ugly and desperate. One of them kicked the boards off from one side of the guard house so a man could easily escape. These boards were nailed around the guard house – not up and down. All I was armed with was an unloaded musket with a bayonet. After repeated orders to this fellow to stay where he belonged, he was making a desperate effort to crawl out and had succeeded in getting both feet on the outside. I hastily put him astride the point of my bayonet and hoisted him back where belonged. He lifted easily and caused no more trouble. I never know why they put me on the guard house, for the duty previously had been at another place.



We were at the Grand Rapids training camp for about two months. During this time my wife visited me several times and we were privileged to visit friends in the city over night. She would come to the camp in the morning and stay with me for the day. Our rations at this camp were good and she would eat with me.

After my wife's visit two or three fellows appealed to my sympathy and asked to get home to see their families (no furloughs were granted). I was on guard at the back of the camp. There were bushes around the edge. I did not tell them that I would let them out, but in the night I saw some fellows coming and heard a light whistle from their direction. I walked in the other direction and when I turned around it was just in time to see their coat tails fast disappearing in the distance. The sad part of this experience is that two of these fellows went to Canada and only one came back.

After our encampment at Grand Rapids we were ordered to Washington. Our horses were carried by freight and we had good passenger cars. On our trip the car in which my company was riding was derailed and I succeeded, by pulling the rope, in stopping the train in time that no damage was done, although we were waylaid for about two hours. I think this happened in Maryland. Baltimore was being guarded for Lincoln by detectives at this time, and we wondered if the switch might have been opened by the enemy when our car of Union soldiers was derailed. We were about two days in going to Washington. We reached there in the morning, tired and hungry. The bugle soon called us to breakfast. Our tables were long and in a barracks. There were so many of us that we were obliged to stand with our sides to the table, as there was not enough room to face it. With one hand we could manage our black coffee with brown sugar, hardtack, and beans. Our new camp was soon equipped with tents, cooks, and rations. We resumed our drilling along the same line which we had in Grand Rapids. We were stationed there for most of the winter.

The band which was organized in our regiment used to give very nice music at times after the bugle had called "light out." The boys of the Civil War had to "pack up their troubles in the old kit bag and smile, smile, smile" in order to endure, the same as the boys of the World's War. There was a man by the name of Church in our regiment who would slip out on a big box in front of his tent and call out as for a well-equipped circus when the band would stop playing at intervals. He would take one in imagination to see all sorts of animals from all parts of the world and all sorts of side shows where he would emphasize the fact that men, women, and children were welcome. He must have traveled with some show in his life time. He made great sport for the soldiers as he would shout, "Right this way, ladies and gentlemen. Get your tickets for the big show in the big tent. This is the last chance to see the finest specimen of orangutan ever exhibited in this country."

In the spring, part of our regiment was put on detached duty along the Potomac Canal and River to guard against "Mosby's Gorillas," who did their desperate work in the night, turning their prisoners over to the rebel army and destroying government property. Early one morning we were ordered four miles up the Potomac to help company I, who had been attacked by Mosby's Gorillas the night before. Their captain had deserted them, also the lieutenant. The Orderly Sargent had taken command and faced the enemy with these words, "Come boys, we have got to fight." He raised his revolver just as one of Mosby's men did likewise. They fired at the same time and each man fell at the same time with a bullet through his head. This company was re-enforced and held the post.

It was my duty at one time to guard the Potomac for two miles up the canal. I would follow the "toe-path" two miles up and back for two hours duty during the night, then four hours off, then again for two hours. About eleven o'clock one night the bank of the "toe-path" caved off and let me with my horse down into the canal. It was a great struggle to get out. Had it not been for the straps across my shoulders, attached to my gun, which I finally contrived to throw over the bank, I could not have gotten out as soon as I did. By keeping my horse's rein over my arm, when I pulled myself out I was able to help my horse out. This was a hard experience to say the least.

I was sent to guard a crossing up the Potomac all alone one night. This was an all-night watch. To reach this place I had to travel through about one-half or three-fourths mile of dense forest to get to the old ford where the enemy might cross. This seemed to me an injustice and against military law. For what would one man be against so many? But I obeyed the command and spent the night there alone with my horse. I had been admonished not to strike a match or make any light for fear of the enemy's guns. I cannot tell the feeling I had there that night, so far away from anyone who cared for me. My horse was my only sympathizer, and when I could come near him he would rub his nose against as if to ask, "Why do you not move out of here?" The whip-poor-wills and katydids did their part in entertaining and breaking the stillness of the night now and then.

Mosby's object was to watch the canal for canal-boats which might be loaded with government supplies. These they captured.

Our encounters with spies at this time were numerous, and it would take a great deal of time to tell of our many experiences with them. Many we captured and some made their escape back to the enemy with their reports. Many and hard were the breaking up of our camps while on this duty. We might be located as comfortably as we could make ourselves and our horses when we would be ordered up the river a few miles, no matter how cold or disagreeable the weather might be. At one time Uncle Levi Barnard, myself and a few others were sent out for about fourteen miles on a scouting trip. We came back in the night and found our camp broken up and everything gone. Upon inquiry we learned that our company had been seen moving over Bolivar Heights towards Harper's Ferry, so we followed in that direction. Finally we saw lights. Upon arriving in camp, to our great surprise we found Uncle George Barnard had built us a little shelter with boards he had found, had a nice little fire to welcome us and also bunks made. This is one of the pleasant memories and we had a few of them, now and then. A few of the places where we were stationed while on this duty were Big Falls, fourteen miles above Washington; also Harper's Ferry, Martinsburg, etc.

While on our way to Harper's Ferry we were fired on once or twice by the enemy, and at Rockville as we had quieted down for the night the order came for "Boots and Saddle" at about ten o'clock. We were ordered in the line of battle and very soon we were fired on by the enemy. We were ready, however, and fired back. One of our men was killed and that was Dallas Dexter from north of Saranac. A fine man he was, one whom we could always depend upon. He was buried by the Quakers in a little cemetery near Waterford. Such battles were many. I could not tell how many, but we were fortunate and lost but few men in these small battles.

About this time the battle of Gettysburg was fought. We were connected to this by holding the crossing at Harper's Ferry. The roar of guns continued for several days at Gettysburg. During this time the rebels got entrenched behind us at Harper's Ferry. We got them out by backing a long freight train with iron clad cars and artillery in the rear of the train so as not to disable the engine. We fired for an hour or two.

The battle of Cold Harbor was a hard fight. This was fought in the woods, and the forest was set on fire by the heavy guns. Many horses were killed, and wounded were left suffering in the flames. Many men were killed.

The Second Battle of the Wilderness was a very similar battle to that of Cold Harbor. As the name implies, this battle followed another battle fought in the same place and on the same ground. As I rode on battlefield my horse's foot hit something, and as I looked I saw it was the skull of one of the victims of the previous battle. This was somewhat of a gruesome aspect, but the order of the battle was that we must charge on.

There was a field with a forest on each side of it and a ridge in front. Our company was behind this ridge watching for the enemy. A rebel officer with a big black feather in his hat came out in the field and ordered his army to charge. They did not obey his orders, however. I, with others, fired on him and he fell off his horse in an instant. Then we were ordered to charge and the enemy met us, although they kept out of sight to a great extent. We were in the open field and woods. The woods were set on fire. I had used all the loads in my rifle and revolver and had gone over the ridge to re-load. A bugler met me there. As we hesitated there loading my gun, we were fired upon by the artillery and the shells burst over our heads. We did not mind it nor stop to think how we had singled ourselves out as a target for the enemy to fire at. Uncle Levi Barnard's horse got away from him in this battle and was found the following evening. I stayed mounted and got away unharmed, although it was a terrible battle and many men and horses were killed. Uncle George Barnard was in the battle also and came out alive.

About this time we were sent about twenty miles up the Potomac to Falling Waters. Here we found that Lee's army had built a pontoon bridge across the river. This was a bridge made of boats anchored side by side with stringers and planks laid from one to the other. Whole armies could cross this bridge. Lee's men were stationed here to guard the bridge. Our men were hiding in some shrubbery along the river when the rebel army came skulking along. They had heard the firing at the bridge and had their eyes in that direction when our men came from the bushes with their revolvers leveled at them. They were given orders to dismount and lay down their arms and give themselves up. This they did and were taken prisoners. Our company destroyed the pontoon bridge, dumped their wagons and supplies into the Potomac, and took the prisoners back to Harper's Ferry, and there they were sent to Washington. It was quite a pleasure for me, as I rode in the rear as one of the guardsmen, to watch one of the rebel prisoners who wore a tall red peaked cap. As his fancy head gear bobbed up and down it frightened a horse nearby and this furnished quite a bit of amusement, for me at least. The capturing of these prisoners and this bridge was a great victory for the Union men. We learned later that there was quite a battle at Falling Waters, for the rebel army were not able to cross the pontoon bridge as they had anticipated and came to defeat at this place.

Since the backbone of the Confederacy had been broken at Gettysburg, we had been meeting victories here and there and little thought as we were marching these prisoners to headquarters that the tables would be turned and ours would be a like fate. No, not a like fate, but a far worse fate. For nothing could compete with the terrible outrages of the rebel prison.

(This article is part 1 in a series by Sheldon Curtiss, Civil War Veteran.)



Calhoun County Genealogical Society

Budget 2015-2016

Income

Membership Dues	1300.00
Donations	50.00
Miscellaneous	28.10
Total	1378.10

Expenses

Officers

Awards	85.00
Dishonesty Bond*	359.10
Dues	120.00
Government Fees	20.00
Post Office Box	84.00

Committees

Hospitality	100.00
Membership	25.00
Newsletter	410.00
Programs and Publicity	
Speaker Fees	150.00
Publicity Copies	25.00
Total	1378.10

* 3 Year Total

Generations

Calhoun County Genealogical Society
PO Box 879
Marshall, MI 49068-0879

Calhoun County Genealogical Society *Calendar of Events*

CCGS monthly meetings are typically held the fourth Tuesday of each month except July, August and December, and are free and open to the public. Unless noted, meetings are held at 7 p.m. at LDS Marshall Branch Church at 16036 Old US-27 N, Marshall MI

January 26-Beginning Genealogy

February 23-Marshall District Library.

March 22-Researching War of 1812

April 26-Seeking Michigan.

May 24-Get Smart!

June 28-German Research Tips with Don Heider

Have ideas for future programs? Please contact President Brenda Leyndyke, whose contact information is on page 2.