

THE LETTERS OF WILLIAM COY BRYANT

By Mark D. Bryant



Corp. William C. Bryant, 107th Illinois Infantry

Our ancestor William Joseph Bryant had a brother named John Whitney Bryant who had moved west from the family home in New York to Illinois in the 1830's. Through a bit of genealogical sleuthing and a bit of good fortune, a series of letters written during the Civil War between John's son, Corporal William Coy Bryant of the 107th Illinois Infantry and his family in Wapella, Illinois, were discovered by cousins Jan Carpenter and Eloise Richardson in 1998. The descendants of William's sister Mary Jane, held these letters and some photos in a box in their farmhouse attic in Lenox, Iowa. Their discovery opened up a whole new understanding of our William Joseph Bryant's extended family. It is not known the extent that William Joseph and his brother John Whitney communicated, since John had left the Broome County area of New York many years before. It is quite possible that William C. was named after his Uncle William, then living in Tioga County, Pennsylvania, but another possibility is that he was named after his grandfather, who was also named William Bryant.

These letters bring to life the yearning for distant loved ones, the day to day life in an early prairie village and a young soldier's raw observations of his experiences and relationships while serving in the 107th Illinois Infantry regiment during the Civil War. Though there were over 25 letters discovered, it is clear that these are just a few of the many that were written. William C. Bryant enlisted at 18 years old in September of 1862, spent a year in Kentucky patrolling against Confederate guerrilla's and then fought with his regiment through the Atlanta Campaign where he was captured and sent to Andersonville Prison in Georgia and succumbed to disease as did thousands of other prisoners in that notorious prison. I have left the original spelling and wording intact in the letter excerpts.

In the small town of Andersonville, Georgia, it was becoming more and more common for the few citizens to see steam locomotives regularly arrive and hiss to a stop at their depot in southern Georgia. On this particular hot and humid June 9th of 1864, the residents gathered to view this newly arrived batch of Yankee prisoners stuffed uncomfortably into the trailing cattle cars. Confederate militia lined the tracks as the doors on the cattle cars were unlocked and pulled open. Orders were barked and the crowded cars began to empty of the defeated Union soldiers. These trainloads of prisoners had been arriving since February, but for the past month, there had been a significant increase in the number of prisoners.

Union General William Tecumseh Sherman had begun his campaign to capture Atlanta in conjunction with Grant's move in Virginia towards Richmond in the spring of 1864 and with each battle, the number of captured prisoners increased. Though the initial novelty of seeing captured Yankees arrive in their small village had worn off for most residents, it was still a curiosity to see the Yankee soldiers line up in the road under guard until it was time for them to enter through the large gate at the North end of the 18 acre prison that had been built back in February for their accommodation. Occasionally a resident would slip a loaf of bread or piece of fruit to the prisoners, but it was more common for the soldiers to be met by blank stares or a derisive comment from the local town folk.

Among the prisoners that arrived in Andersonville that day was 20 year old William Coy Bryant. His regiment, the 107th Illinois Volunteer Infantry, was part of General Sherman's army on the march towards Atlanta. They had been fighting and maneuvering against the rebel army for a hard month already and each gain came at a heavy price. On the eve of June 4, 1864, William's regiment had been on the periphery of a weeklong battle to break through the rebel lines in the vicinity of Dallas, Georgia, when General Sherman saw an opportunity to flank the rebel positions. William's division was quickly sent towards the rebel's rear to capture the Western & Atlanta rail line. It was during this movement that William and his illiterate neighbor, Jimmy Hazelett, were captured on June 5th and subsequently loaded into the cattle cars for their journey to the notorious Confederate prison at Andersonville.

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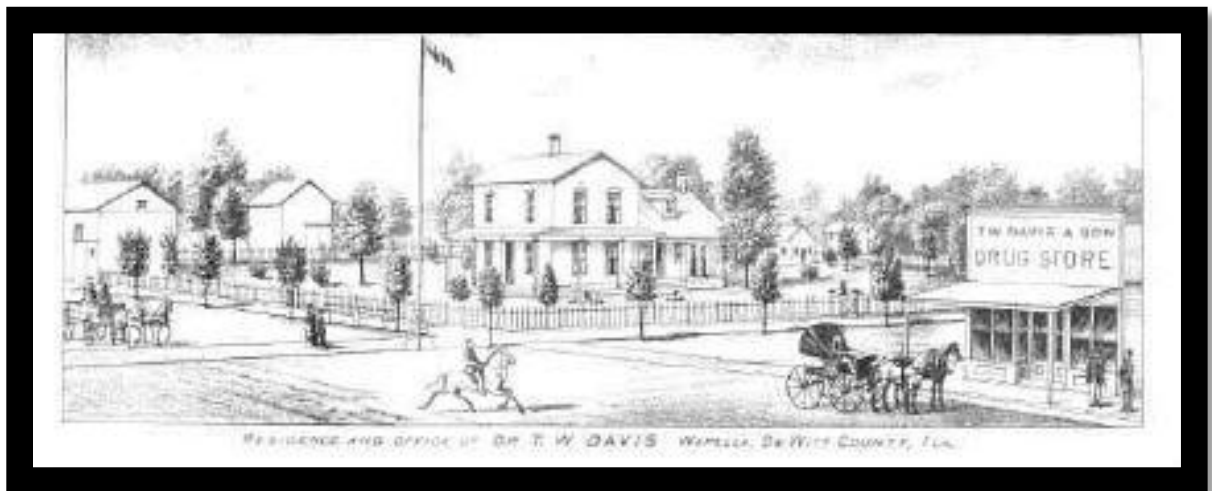
John Whitney Bryant was the older brother of our William Joseph Bryant. John Bryant is thought to be the second son born to William and Diana (Livermore) Bryant in Broome Co., NY in 1808, moving to Farmington, Illinois, a small farm town 15 miles due west of Peoria, Illinois before 1840. John was a 33 year old farmer when he met and married 20 year old Eveline Coy on March 13, 1841, who was herself a native of New York. Eveline was the second child of Gibson and Amanda (Sweet) Coy and had moved with her family from New York in 1832 when Eveline was just twelve years old to make a stake in the fertile prairie land of Illinois. John and Eveline Bryant had two children, Mary Jane, born in 1842 and William Coy Bryant, born in Farmington in 1844. After spending 20 years in the Farmington area, Eveline's parents, Gibson and Miranda Coy moved to the newly forming town of Wapella, in the County of DeWitt about 60 miles southeast of Farmington in the summer of 1853.

The area around Wapella had been homesteaded, tilled and farmed for 20 years prior, but Gibson Coy was the first official resident of the new town. He was also the first Justice of

the Peace in Wapella. The Central Illinois Railroad built an immense brick hotel and intended to locate their repair shops there, which would prove to be quite promising for anyone who would want to locate in Wapella. Gibson built a 16' x 40' board shanty with bunks that lined both walls, filling the bunks with straw for sleeping purposes. While Eveline was the second child and married, she had plenty of younger siblings to fill those bunks. There were eleven Coy children. As a play on her maiden name and married name, Gibson would affectionately call his wife "Sweet Corn." Soon, other aspiring citizens moved to the new town of Wapella and stores, churches and residences began to rise.

In 1860, John and Eveline Bryant also left Farmington and followed Eveline's parents to Wapella and took up residence in an apartment at the rear of a drug store in the heart of town. Gibson Coy, at 65 was now a clerk in a store, while John W. Bryant found a plot of land to plant his corn in what was boasted to be the best soil in Illinois and continued as a farmer. William C. Bryant, at age 16, was a farmhand. William was known as Billy to his family.

The Bryant's soon became integral parts in this young community of 500 residents. William became friends with nearby neighbors Charlie Abbott, the son of a well to do widow farmer and Albert Metz, the son of a merchant. Another resident nearby was a cantankerous farmer by the name of Joseph Hazelett who had moved his family west from his native Virginia. Along with his wife Miranda, they were the parents of 13 children, all with little education. Based on the tone of some of the letters, this family may have been held at a distance, but it was their fourth child Jimmy Hazelett, who would later share the horrible experience of imprisonment with William at Andersonville. The Hazelett's lived between the Metz's and Gibson Coy.



A scene from Wapella, Illinois in 1882

Other nearby neighbors and friends of the family were 31 year old blacksmith Milton Copeland and wife Serilda with three kids, a tall merchant named Philip and his wife Matilda Gossard with five children, the physician John and Mary Wright with their three young kids, the 34 year old butcher James T. Brooks and his wife Sarah with three kids and Thomas Milholland and his wife, a young couple who are thought to have been recent arrivals in Wapella. Thomas

was an outspoken, yet respected, kind and good leader among this knot of neighbors and friends. The timing of the Bryant's move to Wapella also corresponded with the mounting tensions between the Northern and Southern States. It was not long before the men of these families answered the call to serve as soldiers in the coming fight against the breakaway states of the Confederacy.

When the Civil War broke out in April of 1861, the rush of those wishing to enlist quickly exceeded the demand. Many were turned away, but that changed when Abraham Lincoln put out a call for 300,000 volunteers in the summer of 1862 when it was becoming apparent that this war was not going to be a quick war. Abraham Lincoln was a familiar figure to the residents of Wapella and not just because he was now the President of the United States. His hometown of Springfield was a short 40 mile train trip to the west of their town and he had maintained a law office in the DeWitt County seat of Clinton, a few miles down the road from Wapella. Lincoln's call for volunteers aroused the patriotic spirit of many of the young men from DeWitt County who were soon to make up six of the ten companies of the newly formed 107th Illinois Infantry Regiment.

At 18 years of age, William Bryant was one of the volunteers who enlisted and was assigned to Co. "A". William was by no means alone. In the short time their family had lived in Wapella, they had no problem making new friends. Among the other volunteers were good friends Thomas Milholland, Milton Copeland, Albert Metz, Anthony Randall, Andrew Wunningham and family friends James Brooks and Philip Gossard. In fact, nearly everyone assigned to William's Company was familiar as everyone lived in the same community. All were excited and eager to do their part. Each person in the regiment soon found their place. William was made a corporal while his good friend Thomas Milholland became a first Lieutenant. The butcher James Brooks was elected to be the Captain of Co. "A", Milton Copeland became a corporal and Philip Gossard was made a sergeant.

The regiment mustered in on September 4, 1862 at Springfield, IL and showed up in nearby Clinton to board trains on September 29th bound for Louisville, Kentucky. There were few families that weren't represented in the 107th. Prior to leaving for the east, the whole community turned out and hosted a huge dinner for the 1,010 Illinois volunteers in Clinton's town square. The DeWitt County Bible Society handed out bibles to each member, leading citizens made eloquent speeches and poetry was published in the area newspapers to let each and every member know that their community supported them fully. A rendition of the popular song "Dixie" was also customized for the new warriors of DeWitt County:

DEWITT DIXIE.

By "The Parson."

There's not a boy in Illinois,
That wouldn't fight and die with joy,
For the Union, the Union, the Stripes and the Stars.
There's not in the Garden State a girl
That wouldn't the starry flag unfurl
O'er the gallant boys who fight for the Stripes and the Stars.

Chorus

*Join the Nation's Chorus, away, away,
To take our stand
For Fatherland,
And the starry banner o'er us!
Away, away, away to the fight for the Union!
Away, away, away to the fight for the Union!*

O forward boys, thru' sun and showers!
Sure the victory shall be ours!
We fight for the honor of the stripes and the stars!
With Colonel Snell to lead the van,
(The Lord be praised for such a man!)
We'll conquer all the foes of the stripes and the stars.

The rebel crew had better "git"
On double quick; for "Little DeWitt"
Is coming down to strike, boys, for Liberty and Law!
Hip hip hurrah! Here's three times three
For Little DeWitt and Victory!
Hip, hip, hurrah, boys! Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!

Long live the gallant hearted boys,

The Volunteers from Illinois!
Long live our Governor, Dick Yates the good and true!
Up, up with the glorious stripes and stars!
And down with the treacherous stars and bars!
Long live the Union, and the Red, White and Blue!

Long live the friends we leave behind,
The Parents, Wives, and Sisters kind!
Long live the Girls who love the Volunteer!
And when the din of war is done,
The battle fought, the victory won,
We'll away to the Hearth and the Homes we love so dear!

Following this rousing send off, the troops lined up to board the trains at the depot and their loved ones gathered around to say their goodbyes. The joy quickly turned to sorrow as if a dam of long pent up grief had just burst. Tears and great sadness flowed freely, for the reality that not all of these boys were going to return home broke to the surface. The train left the station for a small camp in Indiana on the banks of the Ohio River.

There was a sense of urgency among the Union commanders in the Western Theater at this time. Confederate General Braxton Bragg was presently marching north through Kentucky at the head of over 20,000 rebel troops and there was a scramble to assemble enough troops to meet the threat. Upon arrival in Indiana, just across the Ohio River from Louisville, it became apparent that the 107th Illinois was in need of discipline and drilling and was not ready to be sent off into battle. The 107th's first Colonel, Thomas Snell was formerly a cattle broker and had acquired all of his military knowledge from that profession. When the troops marching at

the head of the column would fail to hear his orders, he would gallop to the front and round the men up as though they were a herd of steers. Experienced instructors were soon brought in and the 107th spent the next two weeks being properly trained.

The families at home began missing their loved ones right away and soon engaged in the most ready form of communication available at that time. It was at this time that the series of letters between William and his family began. "Dear Sir," mockingly wrote William's sister Mary Jane three weeks after William's departure, "as you have not written I thought I would write until you did. What in the name of common sence don't you write you have not written since John brought that letter." Those at home were eager to hear from their soldier relatives, but the army had bigger plans for them than sitting idly writing letters home and kept them plenty busy with constant training.

The formality of Army life was foreign to many citizens including Mary, "Cap. Brooks says that he thinks you will get your pay to day so come home by all menz." The topic of coming home was a consistent theme, but as the family was soon to find out, getting a leave for home was a rare occurrence. In the letters, the former butcher, Captain Brooks, was a familiar person to the Bryant family prior to his captaincy. He had apparently returned to Wapella on official business. "by the way Billy," Mary continued, "Brooks says you and Wineham [Winningham] have the best trained men of any of the rest of the noncommissioned officers I tell you we have heard A good praise of you and when pa heard what Cap B. said it made him jump around."

Not all of the soldiers were getting equal praise, "Andy Harrold came home about three weeks ago and stayed too or three days and took the north train and has not been heard from since." Mary went on to add, "Elle thinks he has deserted she says that she would rather he would have died in the hospital or on the Battle field than have him sneak of[f] in that way." As the war dragged on and became more unendurable, desertion became a temptation that many soldiers succumbed to. For the families at home, the idea of desertion was a deplorable dishonor. It was certainly something William repeatedly stated that he wouldn't consider. Mary ended her letter, "Well right about face, double quick, shoulder arms and come home to morrow if you can." She then added, "It is a dredful pretty day."

After their period of training in Indiana, the 107th crossed the Ohio River into Louisville, Kentucky. The confident regiment marched through the streets of Louisville, trying to keep their files in shape. Someone started the song of "John Brown's Body," a decidedly anti-southern tune, and the whole regiment chimed in, ignorant of the fact that it did not accord with military rules, but not unconscious of the feeling of rage it stirred up among the rebel citizens there. The regiment camped on the other side of Louisville and were eventually ordered to Elizabethtown in the heart of Kentucky to contest the rebel General John Morgan.



Colonel Thomas Snell

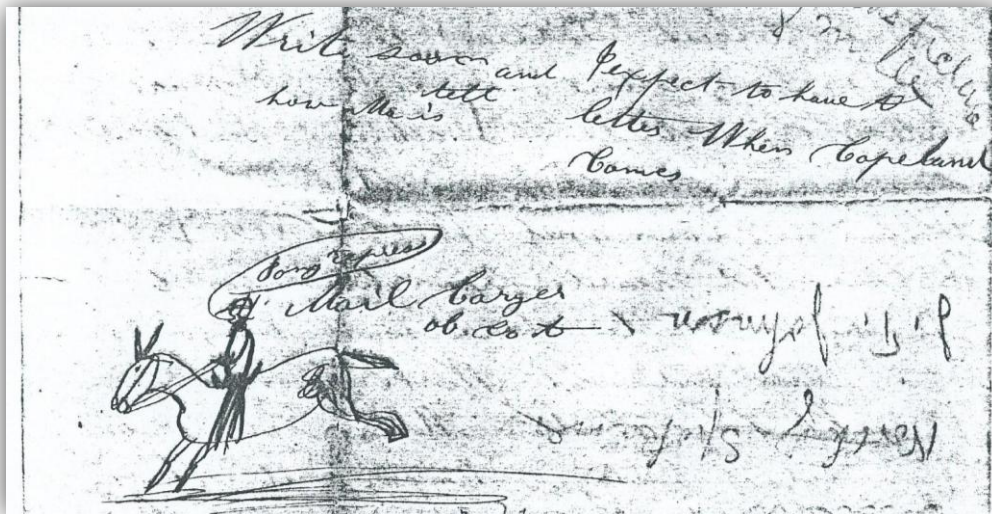
On the way towards Elizabethtown, the train conveying the regiment was stopped and William's company was ordered off in the dark and told that Morgan's Raider's were in the immediate vicinity and to expect an attack before morning. Everyone was ordered out on a line straddling the tracks and parallel road. The train then proceeded on its way with the

remainder of the regiment. Company "A" spent the night in morbid terror. Towards morning, noises were heard on the road and a corporal who had the only experience with battle due to being a peripheral participant in the Mexican War 20 years earlier, took charge and yelled a halt and fired his rifle. Fortunately, his aim was poor and after some initial excitement, the company found that they had succeeded in capturing a man and his mule. It was later ascertained that Morgan's men were hundreds of miles away.

The 107th's Col. Snell was very wary of being stationed in the midst of Rebel country. The inhabitants were labelled as "secesh" because of their desire to secede from the Union. When a rumor spread that area secesh planned on poisoning pies to sell to the troops, Col. Snell became unglued when he saw several children selling pies amongst some convalescents. He ran through the young peddlers and began stomping on their baskets of pies. This and other indiscretions committed by his regiment sealed the fate of the inexperienced colonel. William wrote to his sister, "Col snell is under arrest at Louisville on account of our killing so Maney hogs and being so ruff With the Cecesh." Though he was well liked by a number of his men, William added, "he is Not fit to Comand A regiment at all."

William received the job of mail carrier for the regiment running between Camp Nolan and Elizabethtown, finding a few distractions along the way. "I see a great many girls on the road..." he wrote his sister Mary. "I have Got acquainted With three or four Girls their names is Miss Lee Craig, Miss Mary Parks, Miss Nannie Cook Miss Elizabeth Walker ... I have droped those Cecesh Girles I Never Go to their houses aney More since I Got acquainted With those Union Ladies."

William also gave a report of other members of the regiment for the families back home, "I seen Charley Abbott evry Day I Go up their and that is evry Day the boys are all Well." He went on to add, "Tomas Millholland says he is looking for his Wife on the train this Week he is Well and he is A Blowing and talking as usual." As an officer, Thomas Milholland had the benefit of finding housing for his wife nearby. This became a common practice amongst the officers in William's regiment. William signed this letter and drew a sketch, "Pony Express Mail Caryer of Co A."



One day, Captain Brooks of William's company came into camp and said that he had received a letter from a soldier confined in the local jail. The prisoner wrote that he had been confined for purely military matters and feared what would become of him when the troops left the area and left him in the charge of the local secesh. Capt. Brooks said that there was nothing he could do, but that didn't mean that nothing could be done and then he offered a challenge saying that there was no way a soldier should be left behind. Members of the company took the bait and they immediately began forming plans.

They went to the local hardware store, bought an axe and that evening proceeded to the jail, demanding the jailer to open the door. The jailer claimed his wife had the keys to the jail door. Undeterred, the group found a beam to use as a battering ram and splintered the jail door. At 6'-4", Philip Gossard, the merchant friend of the Bryant family back in Wapella and presently Company "A's" First Sergeant, stood next to the opening, held a lantern and shouted commands. They then took the axe to the wooden cell doors and were making sufficient progress when it was discovered that two companies of a neighboring Illinois regiment were on their way to put an end to the disturbance. The group of Company "A" men hastily threw down their tools and ran back to their camp.



Sergeant Philip Gossard

The officers of the neighboring Illinois regiment angrily stormed into the 107th's camp and demanded a roll call. All were present and when witnesses were procured, the only one they could identify was Sergeant Gossard due to his tall height and being the holder of the lantern. He spent the next several weeks in a guardhouse in Louisville for the act. Later, it was learned that their efforts effected the release of the "soldier", who was actually a citizen confined for stealing horses and some negroes incarcerated for murder and other offenses.

"Dear and Beloved Son," Eveline penned to William, "Another week has rolled around and your expected letter has not come yet—for every Saturday night we look for one..." Letters were an endearing form of communication among the separated family members. The usual mode of sending letters through the post office was unreliable and one batch of mail was even intercepted by some of Morgan's men. There is frequent mention of missing letters. Whenever a member of the regiment came home on leave, he came bearing letters, money and notes to be distributed to the families at home. On his return to the regiment, he again was laden with return mail and sometimes packages and food for the distant loved ones.

Eveline went on to tell William about their Christmas and New Year's celebrations. She described the turkey, bread, pies and cakes and mentioned William's aunt's Jane, Laura and Hat and their surprise visit to his grandparent's house. After talking about the holiday's, Eveline gave an update about John Bryant, "Pa is killing hogs today—Pa and Troxall have gone to gether and are butchering at Troxall." Eveline continued, "He has 7 and we have 2, next year we will have more if they do well." By leaving for the war, William, as well as all the young men who left their families, placed a burden on those left at home. Neighbors often had no choice but to share each other's chores. Eveline added, "Emma Gossard just brought a letter here to send with this... Write when ever you get a chance... God Bless and protect," ended Eveline's letter.

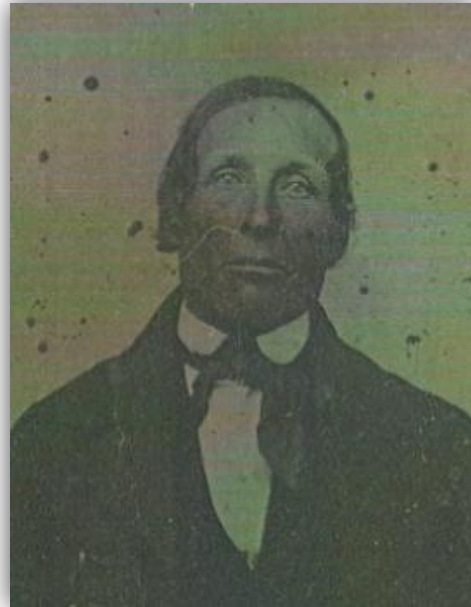
William's regiment moved twenty five miles further south to Munfordsville from Elizabethtown in the middle of December 1862. Munfordville was the site of a Union defeat a few months earlier at the hands of Confederate Gen. Braxton Bragg.

"Dear parents and all," began William's letter dated January 12, 1863, "I thought I Would Write to you and let you know that I am Well and have not got the Rheumatism by a long shot." Apparently, word had reached home that William was sick and had received a furlough, giving his family hope that they would see him soon. William dispelled this hope. Both badly wanted to be reunited, but William would only think of getting a furlough the honorable way. William continued, "that James Rolls lied When he told I had them [furlough] you want to know Why I Did Not Get A furlough Well it is Just this Way you Can Not Get A Written furlough to save your Neck or any Body elce Those that Went home on a French furlough and are counted as Deserters..." A French furlough was when a soldier left his regiment without permission. There were some however, that were genuinely sick, "Charlie Abbott is some sick he has A kind of A Dumb Ague... I am Going to Write A letter to his folks to Day for him."

It is no wonder that many were sick and rumored to be so. William went on to say that Munfordsville was a "sickly Place." He described how neighboring cavalry regiments would haul their dead horses down by the river and how it was necessary to carry their water up a 100 foot hill by steps cut into the ground. He went on to explain that just forty yards from their tents, hundreds of rebels from the previous battle were buried in a ditch and since there was very little topsoil, they were only buried one foot deep. "We live in H...ll," he exclaimed. "Write soon By By Folks."

"Dear Sister," wrote William. "yesterday I Went up to... whare Tom Milholland is stationed." William went on to describe a dance and dinner and good lodging. "Tom is A fine fellow the boys all like tam Tom first-rate. Brooks is elected Major so tom Will Be Captain I Expect." William went on searching for an excuse to get a furlough, but "it is impossible to Get one unless you take a French one and that I Won't Do on any Conclideration." William turned his thoughts to his father. "When I Get My Money I Will send it home and I Want Pa to use it to Make himself Comfortable I Do Not think he had Better farm very [..?..]" There must have been reports of John Bryant's struggles with the crops. William suggested switching from crops to raising hogs if "farming is that Poor", he retorted. "I Will Be Darned if I Will farm When I Come home."

"Dear Son" began Eveline. She spent the first two thirds of her letter updating William about events at home, "Mr William Taylor is dead—he died last Friday with the Consumption— Mrs. Scherr died very suden at Sprinfield... Mrs. Milholand is going to move into Morrisons house... Mr Shank has sold out to Seth Battles..." Her conversation then turned to politics and community members who had faltering loyalty, "The Copperhead Democrats cant do much in the legislature..."



John Whitney Bryant

the rebels in the South are in a bad fix... the opinion of the union men here is that the war cant last much longer.”

Referring to her cantankerous farmer neighbor, Joseph Hazelett, she said, "I told you old Hazlet was union, well he ant nother Loer says the 107 Regiment is nothing but a pack of thieves, they come pretty near getting in to a fight about it." One reason old man Hazelett may have had his hackles up is because his boy, Jimmy had just signed up with the 107th two days before as a recruit and was now a new member of William's Company "A".

Even though Illinois was a Union state, there were a number who expressed sympathies for the southern cause and that didn't set well with those loyal to the Union, particularly Eveline, "Mrs. Brooks says she is a Secesh, aint that nice for a Majors wife in the Federal Army--" Suspicious, Eveline continued, "do you sopose Brooks is a true man to the union. I guess he needs watching a little." William's sister Mary added in the same letter, "...Mrs. Randall is a regular Seceshsh and don't make any bones in saying so... I for one will not step my foot in her house." One reason for mixed sympathies in a Union state was that many recent arrivals in Illinois had their roots from the south and it was hard to lay their loyalties aside.

William wrote back and in return shared his daily events, "I sent My Money over the river by



A depiction of camp life at Munfordville

Copeland to the express office to send to you.... The Weather is Warm the birds are singing and its just like spring.... We have a Good Deal of rain but as the Ground is stoney and hard it Does Not Get Muddy like Ills." William also shared about suspect neighbors, "I received a letter from Frank Kidder the other Day he is a real Copperhead Demmocrat...." He again reminded his parents about the miserable conditions, "We have to carry our Watter up a hill that is one hundred and twenty feet high by means of steps cut in the rocks." He ended his letter, "I have Not things to Write any More So Good by from W.C. Bryant"

William had been gone from home for five months, which was an eternity for someone who had never been away from home before. William

anticipated receiving a furlough as he saw numbers of his company mates head for home. The next several letters revealed the longing that both William and his family had for his hopeful homecoming. Eveline wrote, "The union folks think the war cant last a great while longer. I would be grad (ha ha) to have it ended, so you could come home once more—we would be mighty grad (ha ha) to se you home again but not at the expence of Honer. We live in no fear of that from you." Eveline ended her letter with this, "Pa says he would like to go down thare and see you, and I know I would shure, but we will have to stay at home, and hope and pray you may come back to us safe once more, and stay." She signed it, "Eveline Bryant."

"Our Dear Son," began an excited Eveline. She had just received a letter about the possibility of William returning home. "Bless your soul, we say come home if you can get a furlough We have ten dollars left—that is good for you as far as it will go—and if you could have heard us say—Come home—you would have started right straight home... we all say Come..." Quite unfortunately, William returning home had been just a rumor.

For a number of the following letters, there was a strong hope that William would be coming home, "... we shall look for you every Train that come from the south..." The sad reality was that furloughs were very hard to get for young single men. The priority went to the married men and officers. Three months after the initial hope of a furlough, William was resigned that his time would be slow in coming, "Well I Cant Go home Next time as Tom says there is some Married Men to Go yet and I Will have to Wait till they Go..." a frustrated William lamented, "Well I expect after the Married Men have all Gone home two or three times apiece and Spent all their Money A Going and there is No body Else to Go I will Get To Go then..."

There was worry circulating in town about William's hometown friend Abe Metz, the son of the neighboring merchant. Eveline writes, "Metzs folks are afraid that Abe will desert They don't get no letters from him—whare is he. In your next letter write about him." There is frequent mention of other sons that have deserted and that does not sit well with those at home. There is an eagerness to see them meet justice for their cowardice. William wrote of a Court Martial in the regiment in which the deserter's heads were half shaved in front of the Battalion. The local sheriff in Wapella received orders to round up two deserters, chain them and send them to the nearest Military Post. Eveline continued, "If he (Abe) has any notion of leaving do your best to have him stay for the sake of his father and mother if for no other reason."

Unlike other sons, Abe Metz was not a deserter. He had been sick in the hospital with rheumatism and eventually received a discharge from the service. This warranted little sympathy from William's sister Mary Jane when he returned home, "Ab Metz they say is getting to be quite industry he staves in the store most all the time lately."

There are no letters on hand from John Bryant, though there is reference that he wrote several. From the letters, he is well-loved by his family and there is a general concern that he is working too hard and has had struggles with his health. Eveline wrote, "Pa is getting better. I wrote to you ... telling you pa was sick. He is now getting a long first rate." Mary reported that, "Pa, at present is out in the field picken corn with Downing—he wont pick a great deal I guess because he is not stout enough too—"

In a long letter, Eveline commented on John's activities, "Pa has gone to the timber for poles to fix his Corn Crib—he has been picking Corn the 3 or 4 days... he has got most all of his picked and some of Thorps—he has got Capt Dowling horse to work for a while—he thinks he will give up that Land of Thorps, all but 20 or 30 acers if he can. Morrisson wants him to give it up—I would rather he would to." At the end of another letter following a brief report on Pa, Eveline added, "I thought you would be anxious to hear how Pa was."

The letters from Eveline and Mary Jane are full of hometown news and the activities of their friends and neighbors. Tom Milholland's wife Elen is a frequent subject. Based on the letters, her residence is near the Bryant apartment. As the young wife of an officer, she had the benefit of travelling to where the regiment was posted and staying for up to weeks at a time. Her husband Tom is held in high regard by the Bryant family, "I think you have a good friend in Tom Melholland," wrote Eveline, "I belive he is a good harted man, and will do what is right as far as he can." Not everyone was comfortable answering to the young recently promoted Captain. Eveline mentioned their neighbor, the 35 year old merchant and father of five who was Company "A's" acting First Sergeant, "I expect him and Gossard dont get along very well."

News didn't stop with the Milhollands, "... Emma Gossard jest brought a letter here to send with this... Mrs. Copeland and some of Children have been sick this week, but are getting better

now... Mary is out at Procters, has been gone 2 weeks today... Abbott are well... Mrs. Doc Wright talks of going down to Glasgow soon, and wants we should keep 2 of her children." William's regiment had recently moved from the sickly confines of Munfordville, some 20 miles further south to Glasgow, Kentucky. In return for watching Mrs. Wright's two youngest children, Eveline was to be paid \$2.50. "... now do not say one word to any body about it, neither to Tom nor Doc, it will be bringing in a little something for us," Eveline warned.

The days in Wapella were broken up by frequent visits with friends and family and spontaneous activities. Sister Mary told of her and seven friends stopping in at the shop by the railroad and weighing themselves, of going down to Grandma's house for the afternoon, a visit from Aunt Laura and another one from little Sile, "...and is here still." Little Sile is William's same aged uncle and the youngest brother of his mother Eveline. Mary continued, "Mrs. Gossard had a sing last night We had a real good time."

Eveline reported on some of the domestic trials, "We hant got but six shoats left—and yours and Mary's, and hers looks as if it would die... both the cows gives Milk... grandpas Cow got killd on the railroad---... the pigs last fall distroid most all the grass in the yerd---... the cow pretty near spoiled our trees." All was not gloom however, "I have jest been out looking at our rose bushis they are budding out real nice."

Eveline gives us a glimpse of her feelings of old man Hazeletts boy, "—old Hazelets boy wrote home that Elic Morrison cald him a Copperhead. I recon he thought his dad would go rite down and lick him for it—spect he could not whip Elic him selve so told his dady." In spite of these feelings, irony was soon going to pair her boy with old man Hazelett's boy in one of the worst places to visit our country.

"Well folks I have returned from our scout Well and hearty With A few exception and that is sore feet and lame bones We Was Gone five Days." Up to this point, the 107th Illinois regiment had been assigned primarily to garrison duty and to act as a presence in the region to ward off guerrilla attacks. Company "A" received an assignment to assist in chasing off a rebel cavalry detachment that was raiding for supplies in the area. They caught up with the raiders near the Cumberland River in northern Tennessee. After exchanging shots, the rebels "Pulled up stakes and run like Cowards." William carried on with his boasting. "... if A fellow Coald keep up he Coald Play Checkers on their Coat tails."

William went on to describe the rest of their scout, "I Will tell you We Marched 100 Miles in four days." To emphasize that it was not all a holiday, William added, "the Weather is Warm it rained hard all Day yesterday and I Marched hard all Day yesterday Got as Wet as A Drowned rat to... The Night before last it rained all Night We had to Sleep out all Night the Water runs under Me A Perfect stream."

Nearly three weeks later, William began another letter, "I am Well I have been sick for a Week with the Dirhea... it Brought me Down so low I almost Fainted on Dress Parade... it is so awful Warm." William had been fortunate to avoid sickness as long as he did. The constant exposure to the elements and unsanitary camp conditions was actually the biggest killer during the Civil War. Two-thirds of all deaths were a result of sickness. William's touch of diarrhea hung on for periods at a time and he was never able to fully eradicate it. It reoccurred another three weeks after he told his parents he was well. "I Was on Picket last Wednesday Night and it rained all Night as hard as it Could Pour Down and I Was sick all Night." William's worried parents did what they could for their sick son, but with unfortunate results, "Well Mother you Need Not send any of that

Medicine... I broke that Bottle of Medacine... and it runn all over evry thing I had in my knapsack the Doctor Gives Medacine to Cure the Diarhea.”

Sergeant Philip Gossard was home on leave in Wapella and was able to see his newborn sixth child. William was eager for his parents to send goods back with him when he returned, “... send me some Good Paper When Gossard Comes Back... it is hard to Get Good Paper here.” Later in the letter William added, “When Gossard Comes you May send some Dried Blackberries if you have them or aney other Dried fruit as it is better than salt victuals.”

There is a gap in the sequence of letters. Missing is any mention of the 107th regiments involvement in chasing Confederate General John Morgan’s men during their raid through Kentucky, Indiana and Ohio in June and July of 1863. In order to keep pace with Morgan and his raiders, the regiment took a train to Louisville and then a steamer to near Buffington Island, which lies between Ohio and West Virginia on the Ohio River.

Willard Musson, First Sergeant of the 107ths Co. “H” gave this account, “Ever since the 21st day of June last, we have been constantly on the move after Morgan. From that time until the present we have traveled near sixteen hundred miles by land and water. We have experienced some good and hard service during the long march; notwithstanding the muddy roads, rains and heat and not being accustomed to much fatigue, the boys are doing remarkably well.”

The role of the 107th was to block Morgan and his men from returning south. After several attempts to cross the Ohio River back to the south, the remains of Morgan’s men were finally trapped and captured in Ohio. The 107th was assigned to guarding the prisoners until they were sent to prison.



The 107th was part of the forces pursuing Gen. Morgan during his raid.

Two months after writing about the broken medicine bottle in his knapsack, William’s diarrhea progressed to the point that he was being sent to convalesce. “I am going to Lebanon to the Convalasance Barracks.” The respite seemed to pick up his spirits, “I am Doing very Well except When I have to runn to the brush...” Several others from the Company were slated to go as well. The rest of the regiment however, was heading south on trains to New Market near Knoxville, Tennessee. William and the others would join them later when they were cured.

One Company member had already been admitted to a hospital in Louisville. It was someone the Bryant family knew well. “Last Night the sorrowful News Came to us that Gossard was Dead he Died in Louisville hospital Mrs. Gossard was with him.” The cause of death was chronic diarrhea. William reflected, “it Made us feel Bad for it was the first Man that We have lost by Death

since We have been in it is one year Ago last Sunday since We Was sworn into service and it Will be A year the 22nd of the Month since I Was at home.” Philip Gossard died August 10, 1863.

Major Brooks was once again taking a leave and returned to Wapella bearing letters and packages for loved ones. Elizabeth Daigh, the wife of the 107th's new First Sergeant, Jim Daigh, received a watch and a letter from her husband. “She had not heard from him in a month,” mentioned Eveline.

Brooks personally delivered William’s letter to the Bryant family. “Dear Son,” replied Eveline, “We received your letter by Brooks this morning, and you don’t know how glad we all are that you did not go with the regt, because it would of made you real sick.” She continued with loving motherly advice, “now I hope you will stay whare you are till you get real well and be sure that you are well before you start again. It takes a long time to cure that dearea you can get it stoped and think you are cured and the first thing you know, it comes on again be carell what you eat and try and get such things that will do you good---“

Eveline spoke about Philip Gossard’s funeral in the neighboring town. “Mrs. Gossard came home last Friday Morning and brought Mr Gossard. They buerried him with Military Honors. The sermon was Preached at the Longpoint Methodist house by Mr Barger – it was estamated that thare was 800 People, the largest Gethering ever known at Long Point. Thare was between 30 and 40 waggons went down from Wapella.” Matilda Gossard was now a widow with six young children.

Eveline’s letter then shifted to John Bryant. “Pa has been down to Clinton to day and got him a new pair of boots, the first boots or shoes he has had since you went a way. Had to pay five and half dollars for them.” She added a few other mentions of “Pa’s” activities, “Pa has been down in the tinber to day after Blackberys but only got a bout a half pint. He s the berries are Just a bout gone—“ And again, “Pa is now mowing the yard, foir the first time this summer, we let it go to seed, so as get it in to blue grass.” By all appearances, John Bryant was well and as busy as ever. Eveline herself seems to be encouraged, “Pa says his Corn is goin to be first rate the rains and hot wether is Just bringing it nicely out.”

There was one other mention in her letter referring to the death of her uncle Fred one year earlier, “... we are all alive and well – it is the longest time since we have been here that thare has not been a death in some of our family’s. --“ This letter is dated August 19, 1863. As if to fore tell some sense of impending doom, less than one week later, “Pa” had a probable heart attack and died at the age of 55. William and his family had been so looking forward to any kind of a furlough that would have reunited him with the family, but it never occurred before “Pa’s” death. With John Bryant’s death, it appears that William was now finally able to meet the necessary qualifications to merit a furlough and return home, though bittersweet. He also spent more time recovering from his illness at the divisional hospital in Lebanon, Kentucky. There are only three more letters on hand that were written between William and his family following John Bryant’s death. The first one picks up near Knoxville, Tennessee on January 26, 1864.

Since leaving Glasgow, Kentucky and the benign activities of garrison duties for Knoxville, Tennessee, the



John Bryant's headstone at Sugar Grove Cemetery in Wapella, Illinois

regiment has found itself positioned nearer rebel activity and engagements with the enemy are more frequent. It appears that William has recently rejoined his regiment following his sickness and nobody is waiting around to ease William into the new routine. "Dear Mother and Sister," William begins. "Now seat My Self to Write you A few lines to let you know that I am Well and hope this Will find you the Same We Just returned Day before yesterday from A hard tramp of two Weeks Duration through mud and snow Shin Deep all the time."

William went on to describe the past weeks activities including a lot of mud, very little food and "quite a little Skirmish." William elaborated, "the rebs drove in our Picket lines on our right and A hard fight took Place between our Cavalry and the rebl infty our artillery Played on them till long after Night."

This action likely took place at Huff's Ferry in East Tennessee while trying to prevent Confederate General Longstreet from crossing the Tennessee River. Willard Musson, the First Sergeant from Co. "H" gave this perspective, "We were advancing in line and some of the enemy's skirmishers were firing from the shelter of a house. Seeing this, Major Brooks in his excitement gave the following order: 'Capt. T.J. Milholland, deploy Co. A as independent skirmishers. Surround that house, scour those premises thoroughly and murder the d----d inhabitants if necessary.'" The recounting of this order was often met with laughter and one of the first things veterans of the 107th would recall when they met for future regimental reunions.

William described another aspect of marching in rebel territory. "When We stop at Night and there is No rail fence handy We take Barns stables and houses for Fire Wood We Destroy an imence sight of Property When We are A Marching." William shared his optimism about the state of the war, "I think the War is very Near over if old long street is Within 5 Miles of us With 20 thousand Men We Can Clean him out."

William noticed a few changes had occurred in the Company since his return. "I tell you things in the Company are Not like they wer When I left it... the Men have all alterd in their Ways Since then." He added, "Tom is Not like he used to be."

Since returning to the regiment, William shows signs of being torn between loyalty to his family following the death of his father and a responsibility to his company. Leaving his mother and sister alone to tend to the farm and make a living weighs heavily on William. In an earlier letter, William talked about a big signing bonus if he re-enlisted as a veteran. "I am as Deep in the hole as I Want to Be and A little Deeper I Don't know how Maney is A Going but if evry Man in the regt Goes I Wont so their it is."

William is concerned about how his family is doing and worried about their welfare. The family has had to make some adjustments, including selling a horse, which William felt should have been for a higher price. He vents about Troxell, who he feels has taken advantage of the family, "I Will remember him When I Get Home." This leads to a rant about people's attitudes at home, "People Don't Care for Soldiers Families aney More all they Care For is to Get some one to volunteer so as to fill the quota so they Will Not be Drafted."

William's gripes extended to the officers next, especially when many of them were peers before the war, "this thing of one Man having Control over others and Getting Big Pay and then Grumble at the Privates When there is aney thing to Do I Don't like." He advised his young uncle Silas to avoid enlisting, "tell Sile he is his own Boss Man and it is the best for him if I Was I would Not enlist under aney officer I Don't Care Who it is Nor how Good he is." The Generals became the next target, "I Don't know When this War Will be over but I think it Will last A year longer aney how if our Generals Would do Right it Would end in three Months but the infernal officers have Not

Got Money enough they are all striving for Promotions all trying to be president and after the Presidential election the War Will stop.”

What was really bothering William though, is revealed at the beginning of his letter, “Well I have the Diarrhea some yet.” When William ends his letter, he decides he needs to confide with his mother – privately, “Well Mother I am A Going to apply for A Discharge To Doc Wright... If he Cant Cure Me I Want him to Discharge Me so I Can Go Where I can Get Cured.” William didn’t think that Tom would assist in getting a discharge, because according to William, “he is stout and hearty and he thinks evry Boddy is the same as him.”

William came up with a new tact though, “if you Would Get Mrs Millholland Writes to have Tom Discharge Me and Not tell her I said any thing to you about it tell her you Need Me at home as you are A Getting old and I had aught to be at home.” To remind his mom that he was not a shirker, William clarified, “if I was Well I Would Not Care but this Chronic Diarrhea it keeps Me Down Poor and Week and I am Not stout enough to stand the service.” William ended his private appeal by adding, “talk to Mrs Wright a little may be she Could influence Doc A little.”

The girls at home got right down to the task of manipulating William’s discharge and made their back door appeal to Tom Millholland. A couple of weeks later, Tom replied to Mary, writing a fatherly letter and telling her that he would be happy and willing to grant Billy a discharge, “But you Know but little about Military Mary, and I will tell you that I can do no more in that, than the humblest private in the ranks.” Tom went on to explain that the decision had to be made by the Divisional surgeon, who would most likely send him to a hospital. Tom went on to reassure Mary that she need not fear of Billy not getting better, “I think he looks better now than he has since being in Tenn.” Tom then made a promise that he would appeal to the Secretary of War himself and explain the special circumstances. He signed his letter, “I remain your Sincer friend.”

It appears that Tom did pull some strings on William’s behalf, because in his next letter, an upbeat William tells his family about becoming the Divisional Mail Carrier between headquarters and Knoxville and that it is a “good position.” William reassures his family that he is getting stout again. He ends his letter by encouraging them to think about moving back to Farmington, “to live Next Winter or this summer Just as your A Mind.”

William’s last letter dated April 1, 1864, is a short one written in haste before it is time for the mail to go out. He has made arrangements to send fifty dollars of back pay to his mom and Mary. At the end of the letter, William mentions that there is talk of the division moving out. In this regard, William was right. General William T. Sherman was in the process of mobilizing his army for an attack into the heart of the Confederacy, with Atlanta as the goal. The 107th Illinois Infantry regiment had up to this point been a peripheral participant in the war. Things were soon to become serious and it would be hard fighting and hard marching for the next several months.

The 107th Illinois Infantry regiment moved out to join Sherman’s Army on April 27, 1864 and arrived in Calhoun, Tennessee on the 30th. They then moved up to the vicinity of Rocky Face Ridge in northern Georgia. The name described exactly what the Union forces faced. The rebels had dug in along this ridge, blocking any avenues of advance and their position was near impenetrable. Confederate General Joe Johnston commanded the rebel forces and it was his job to keep the Union forces out of Georgia. He was hampered by being outnumbered almost two to one and setting up defensive positions was his best strategy. General Sherman saw that the only solution was to bypass Rocky Face Ridge, but in order to do so, he needed to send in a diversionary force to attack the imbedded Confederates on Rocky Face Ridge, while another force was sent around the rebel flank towards the town of Resaca.

throughout this campaign.

Again at Resaca, the 107th was again engaged in battle, meeting well dug in rebels. Sherman attempted another flanking movement and again found Johnston's army waiting for him, this time at Alatoona Pass. Each time, the rebels occupied stout defenses and it would have been murder for Sherman to try to break through. Sherman's next move was to sneak out of position at night, leave his supply line and move in force to a crossroads hamlet by the name of Dallas. Taking this crossroads would cut off Johnston's supplies. After a vigorous march, they reached the outskirts of Dallas on May 25th only to find that the Confederates had just recently taken up occupancy in force. It was a frustrating development for the men who had marched hard to get there.

The men of Sherman's army had been either digging in, fighting, or marching for the past month non-stop. Another thing that seemed to be non-stop was the rain. One soldier's diary entry simply said, "Rain, Rain, Rain." This placed a strain on the spirits of the men and the horses and mules bringing supplies and ammunition to the men over the near impassable roads. A dip in the road became a lake and fields became quagmires. Mosquitos thrived along with chiggers. "Chiggers are big and red as blood," wrote an Illinois private. "They will crawl through any cloth and bite worse than fleas and poison the flesh badly. Many of the boys anoint their bodies with bacon rines which chiggers can't go." Union General Oliver Howard was to say years later, "These were the hardest times the army experienced."



Sherman's 100,000 man army arrayed itself along a miles long front with his right facing the village of Dallas, the center near a Methodist meeting house called New Hope Church and his left, under the command of General John Schofield, laid opposite of Pickett's Mill. Opposing this massive army were 54,000 rebels, once again formidably dug in behind log bunkers. The 107th Illinois Regiment and Corporal William C. Bryant were part of Schofield's Division.

Gen. John M. Schofield Sherman then began a series of attacks that spanned several days, first at New Hope Church, then Dallas and then Pickett's Mill on May 27th. The 107th was positioned opposite Confederate General Patrick Cleburne's Division. Cleburne was thought to be the toughest rebel General in General Johnston's army. On the morning of the 27th, Gen. Cleburne sent one of his brigades forward to see what the Yankees were up to. They ran right into the 107th and a sharp skirmish ensued. The rebels eventually backed off, but the two sides kept firing back and forth for the rest of the morning.

While the 107th was involved in this skirmish, Sherman ordered a neighboring division to attack the rebels just to the left of the 107th's position. These soldiers stumbled through thick brush for three hours before finally getting into position to attack. By the time the attack was made, the men were tired from their struggles through the brush. Nonetheless, they went forward and fought throughout the day, but the Union troops gained no ground and were pinned down as darkness came. All the troops involved were badly used up. At nightfall, the 107th was ordered to assist these soldiers and help bring their wounded to the rear. This effort came just as General Cleburne ordered his men to clear out the Yankee soldiers pinned down in his front in a rare nighttime assault. The result was that many of the trapped men were captured including a number from the 107th. William C. Bryant though, was able to escape back to the Union lines.

The next few days were spent reinforcing their positions, making them almost into fortresses. Hostilities continued as snipers from both sides kept up an unnerving fire at any

movement. Families back in Wapella would soon hear of the deaths of Company "A's" new First Sergeant, Jim Daigh on June 3rd and of Corporal William Buck on June 4th. Jim Daigh had sent his young wife Elizabeth a watch and letter through Major Brooks the previous summer and was a young father of two. For the remainder of her life, Elizabeth never remarried.

When the Union forces awoke on June 5th, they discovered that the Confederate trenches were empty. This delighted many of the common soldiers. But General Sherman was quite concerned. He soon discovered that the rebels had pulled back to even better positions in the area of Marietta, Georgia. Sherman quickly mobilized his forces and went in pursuit, hoping to get behind the rebels rear and capture the Western & Atlanta rail line. By diverting in the direction of Dallas two weeks earlier, Sherman had left the rail line which was his main means of supply. His men had been subsisting on just bacon and hardtack rations during this time.

It was during this interlude that William Bryant and Jimmy Hazelett, the son of the Bryant family's ornery neighbor, became prisoners of the rebels. We don't know the actual circumstances of William's capture, but we do know it occurred on June 5, 1864, most likely in transit between Pickett's Mill and Marietta, Georgia. There is no record of any skirmishes or battles, but with both forces being in fluid motion, it would be very easy for someone who was foraging for a new source of food beyond hardtack and bacon to run into a rebel patrol. William and Jimmy were loaded into train cars along with other Yankee prisoners and sent to the new prison the Confederates had constructed at Andersonville.

In February of 1864, the Confederate government built a new prison for Federal prisoners near the small hamlet of Andersonville, Georgia. Up until then, most prisoners were taken to prisons in and around Richmond, Virginia, but these prisons were becoming overcrowded and threatened by Union cavalry raids. It was imperative that new accommodations deeper in the south be built.

The reason for the overcrowding was that at the end of 1863, the Union refused to exchange prisoners with the south. One of the reasons was that the southern government refused to recognize negro soldiers and trade them on a one for one basis as with the white prisoners. The other reason was that it became clear to General Ulysses S. Grant that if the Union was going to win the war, it had to be a war of attrition. In simple terms, the north had more men to expend than the south. To Grant's mind, the exchange program was more of a benefit to the south than the north. The south needed every man they could muster, while the north had a steady supply. Eliminating the exchange eliminated needed manpower to the south.

While this was true in rational terms, it did not bode well for those who were captured and sent to the overcrowded prisons with no hope of exchange. Grant summed it up by saying, "as hard as it is on those in Southern prisons, it would be kinder to those still in the ranks if each side kept what prisoners it had, since it would end the war sooner."

Andersonville prison was originally 18 acres in size. Rough hewn pine logs were squared off, stood up in a ditch and fit tightly together before being back filled to form a fifteen foot high enclosure surrounding the place. Sentry boxes were posted at 30 yard intervals along the top of the stockade walls overlooking a 20 foot wide strip of unoccupied ground that was separated from the rest of the camp by a 3 foot high wooden rail called a deadline. Any prisoner caught crossing this line would be shot. A small creek ran through the center of the camp as a source of fresh water. Confederate authorities figured this new prison could adequately accommodate 10,000 prisoners. However, the anticipated supplies for the prison rarely arrived as the economy of the South was

slowly choked off by blockades and the number of prisoners greatly increased with Grant and Sherman's new Spring offensive. Andersonville was the only place to put them.

The first thing that William probably noticed upon approaching the Andersonville prison was the smell. Though the prison was intended to hold 10,000 prisoners, when William arrived there were over 22,000. The Confederates expanded the camp another 10 acres about the time William arrived, but the conditions inside the camp had already deteriorated far beyond any sense of civility. Sickness and disease were already rampant due to the unhealthy and crowded conditions. Several thousand had already died. The small creek quickly became polluted since it was also used as the toilet. Crowds of men would line up at the uppermost entry point of the creek laden with canteens to fill, but even that water was tainted.

William and Jimmy entered an outer gate into a holding pen and after the outer gate was closed behind them, the inner gate was opened. The sight that met them most likely overwhelmed them as it did a New Jersey sergeant named Clark Thorp. He described his impression:

"...Words of mine are altogether inadequate to describe our feelings when the ponderous gates swung open and we saw the interior of Andersonville. Here was a picture of squalor and misery seldom equaled in the sight of man—thousands of men, many of them nearly naked, barefoot, black and filthy beyond the power of words to describe. The space inside was covered, in great part, by rude shelters of all descriptions and sizes, from the somewhat commodious tent made by sewing two army blankets together and stretching them over a ridge-pole and pinning the outer ends to the ground, under which several men could crawl for shelter, to a little affair, made by stretching shirts, blouses, etc., in like manner, which could scarcely shelter two men."

The original design of the prison called for barracks, but due to a lack of supplies and the urgent need to open the prison, none were built and each man was responsible for building their own shelter with whatever materials they happened to bring into the prison with them. Soldiers would pair up with a buddy or a group of men and pool what resources they had. It is known that William and Jimmy Hazelett likely paired up, but there were other members of the 107th Illinois regiment that were already there. Most were captured around Knoxville in January and February and were among the first to arrive at Andersonville. Locating or even recognizing any of them would have been fortunate.

There was another kind of prisoner that formed a band of sorts together. The only interest they had in their fellow man was taking advantage of them. Many newcomers were "befriended" by this group and then beaten and robbed of everything they had. Many times in the night, bands of these ruffians would go out on raiding parties and rob whatever fit their fancy. If anyone resisted, they were beaten senseless with clubs or even murdered. They were given the name "Raiders" and were greatly despised, but there was nothing anyone could do against this group because they were well organized and armed.

The prisoners were given the same rations as were the prison guards. This consisted of poorly prepared and insect infested cornbread and when it was available, bacon, which was often rank. This contributed to widespread digestive problems and the lack of fruits and vegetables caused massive outbreaks of scurvy. The rebel guards were at least able to supplement their rations from outside sources. Coupled with the poor water supply, the stockade became an incubation place for typhoid fever, dysentery, diarrhea and gangrene. Exposure to the weather and malnutrition also took its toll.

By the end of June, the prisoner count was 28,000. When William arrived at Andersonville he was still suffering from the effects of diarrhea. This was no place to expect any kind of healing. Those removed to the hospital rarely returned. There simply were no medical supplies for the prisoners. Anything that made it through the blockades went to the rebel army. This was simply a very grim place to be.

In early July, the "Raiders" had finally become such a disruption, that a group of prisoners formed a police force. The commandant of the camp, Captain Henry Wirz, gave his approval to arrest



Prisoners queuing near the meal wagon at Andersonville prison in 1864

and put on trial the "Raiders." The police force rallied fellow prisoners to arrest the provocateurs and had no problem fielding volunteers. The Raiders numbered in the hundreds, but they were overwhelmed by a great throng of prisoners who stormed their camp. Six of the ringleaders were separated from the others and taken to a cell outside of the prison to await a trial. The others were forced to run a gauntlet formed by

the prisoners. Their camp was dismantled.

The six ringleaders were given a fair trial with their own lawyers and new prisoners formed the jury. All were found guilty and sentenced to hang. When the day came, the prisoners were delivered to a roughly built gallows by a Confederate guard. A huge crowd of prisoners surrounded them and felt no pity as the sentence was carried out. For the rest of Andersonville's existence, there was no longer any fear of being robbed and beaten. This trial had its desired effect.

Despite the distraction of the trial and its outcome, the prison conditions only continued to get worse. Witnesses would describe the area around the toilets as a sea of moving maggots. The population grew so that each prisoner if spread out would occupy an area three feet by nine feet. This of course, did not account for the area around the toilets which were uninhabitable and took up a

sizeable area of the stockade. In early July, a new prisoner from Ohio named David Kennedy arrived and wrote in his diary:

' Wuld that I was an artist & had the material to paint this camp & all its horrors or the toungue of some eloquent Statesman and had the privledge of expresing my mind to our hon. rulers at Washington, I should gloery to describe this hell on earth where it takes 7 of its ocupiants to make a shadow.'

Death became too common. When a prisoner died, he was simply left in the lane that ran in front of his shelter. A tag tied to his toe by his fellow soldiers identified his name and regiment. A prisoner detail would later remove him. The Confederate government was not unaware of what was occurring at Andersonville, but were handicapped to do much to alleviate the situation. Their own war effort was failing and all their resources were sent to support their army. Steps were taken, however, to construct a new prison in Millen, Georgia to help ease the overcrowded and disease ridden conditions at Andersonville, but that was more than a month from being ready.

The hot, sultry days of July turned into a hotter and more stifling August. 33,000 prisoners now occupied the 28 acres at Andersonville. Idled prisoners sought whatever shade they could, looked forward to the food wagon and bartered whatever items they had for anything to help ease their discomfort. It became increasingly hard for them to find space to lie down within the vast pen. The prisoners, nearly naked, suffered from swarms of insects, filth, and disease, much of which was generated by the contaminated water supply of the creek.

One day a spring suddenly sprouted from the ground just inside the deadline near the west wall. Makeshift ladles were quickly made to reach this spring that many proclaimed as "providence" from God. This new spring brought great hope to the suffering, but for many, that hope was too late.

William grew weaker and weaker as he was debilitated by his chronic diarrhea. All Jimmy



Hazelett could do was just watch him die. That day occurred on August 20, 1864, almost a year to the day of the death of his father. Eveline and Mary Jane had most likely heard that William had been captured by now. They probably had no idea how horrible the conditions were that their dear William was

This photo of Andersonville was taken days before William Bryant's death

sent into. Just two years earlier, a young, healthy 18 year old William Bryant had started out on the greatest adventure of his life with many friends and members of his community. He flirted with the local gals, got himself involved in mischief, marched many miles, longed for home and was terribly missed in kind. They would not learn the fate of William until the return of Jimmy Hazelett in April of 1865.

A Connecticut Cavalry Corporal was given the duty of camp clerk at Andersonville by the Camp Commandant, Henry Wirz. His name was Dorence Atwater and he had been given the unenviable task of recording the dead as they were buried. Not trusting the Confederate authorities of retaining these records, Dorence made a second copy which he kept hidden for himself. He was determined to give every prisoner that was buried a name so that they would not be forgotten by future generations. Each deceased prisoner was numbered in order of death. William was grave number 6256. There were to be another 6000 prisoners to follow him.

Following Dorence Atwater's eventual release from prison after the war, the sick and weakened former prisoner stopped in Washington D.C. on his way home to Connecticut. He paid a visit to the Secretary of War's office to present his list of names from Andersonville with the hopes that the government would use it to inform the families of the deceased about the fate of their loved ones.



Dorence Atwater

Edwin Stanton, the Secretary of War acquired the list for a small 'Thank You' fee, but he had no intention of using it to inform loved ones. He feared that if the public knew the true toll at Andersonville, they would attack the administration for using their sons as pawns in their war policy regarding prisoner exchange. He felt that the families should be satisfied just knowing that their son died fighting for their country, even if they were listed as missing. Dorence was even threatened with arrest if he attempted to follow through with contacting families.

Exasperated, Dorence approached Clara Barton, the famous director of the Sanitation Commission and informed her of the large number of unmarked graves at Andersonville and his desire that they should be recognized. Clara met with Edwin Stanton and other decision makers and strongly petitioned for a memorial to be erected in the prisoners honor. Clara's influence was such, that the memorial was approved despite Stanton's reluctance and construction was slated to begin in the spring of 1866. One of Clara's demands was that the list be returned and Dorence Atwater accompany her to Andersonville to lay the groundwork for the Andersonville National Cemetery. Stanton reluctantly handed over the list.

While at Andersonville, Dorence made two more copies of the list before he later returned the original to Stanton in Washington D.C. With his new copies, Dorence Atwater and his family set out to do what the government refused to do. They sent out individual letters to each family of a buried prisoner so that they would know the fate of their son.

On January 2, 1867, Eveline received this letter from New Haven, Connecticut:

Mrs. J.P. Coy

In looking over my rolls I find that W.C. Bryant, Company "A" 107th regiment Illinois, died on the 20th August 1864 of Scorbutus, at Andersonville, Geo. The number of his grave is 6256—

Dave Atwater



William Bryant's headstone at Andersonville National Cemetery

Eveline and Mary Jane had already learned the fate of William from a returning Jimmy Hazelett, but this letter no doubt offered a sense of closure. There were at least eight other families of 107th regiment members in Wapella and DeWitt County that received these Andersonville letters also.

This letter mentions scorbutus as the cause of Williams death. Scorbutus was the technical term of the day for scurvy.

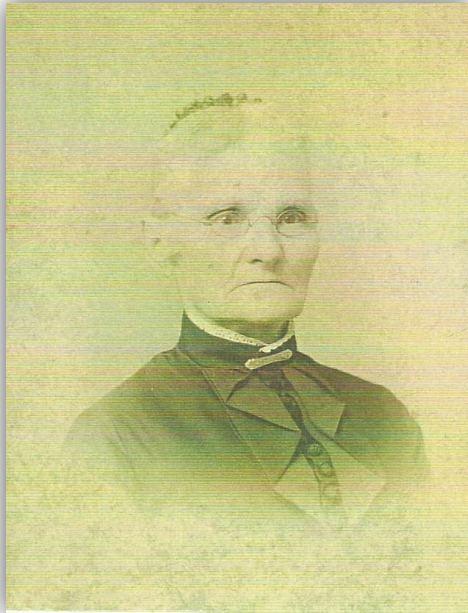
William's regimental records and pension file mention the cause of death as chronic diarrhea. This cause of death was likely obtained from eyewitness accounts such as Jimmy Hazelett and based on Williams bout with diarrhea in his letters, but scurvy no doubt played a part.

For the charitable act of using the list to send personal notices to grieving families, Dorence Atwater was arrested, but soon released when Clara Barton heard of the injustice. The charge was stealing government property. It would be several years however, before Dorence's name was finally cleared.

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With the end of the war, the surviving members of the 107th Illinois Infantry regiment were mustered out and returned home. Milton Copeland, the town blacksmith, returned to his family and his trade and remained in Wapella for at least the next 20 years. Albert Metz, who was medically discharged from the service in 1863, worked in his family's store until he began his own store with \$52 he had sent home and saved while in the service. He later started an undertaker business. He claimed to have tried three times to re-enlist, but was denied each time. William's friend Charlie Abbott had a brother named John who later married Eveline's younger sister Amy following the war. They were active and respected members of the community for many years.

Matilda Gossard, widow of Sergeant Philip Gossard, carried on with her husband's Mercantile business and became rather prominent in the community, opening a millenary later. William's same aged uncle Silas, or Little Sile, never entered the service. He married the Gossard's daughter and next door neighbor, Emily 'Emma' Gossard and became a merchant in Wapella. Captain Thomas Milholland later became the 107th regiments acting Colonel towards the end of the war. He returned to Wapella for a short time before moving to Peoria, Illinois where he engaged his talents as a salesman for many years. Jimmy Hazelett remained in Wapella and became a member of GAR Post #251, a Civil War veteran's organization. He died in 1895.



Eveline Coy in later years

Eveline Coy remained in Wapella for many years. She maintained her own residence near her parents and married siblings. For a short time, 'Little Sile' lived with her following the unfortunate death of his wife Emily. Her father Gibson lived to be 89 years old and passed away in 1886. Eveline's mother Miranda passed away in Bloomington, Illinois in 1897. Mary Jane met a veteran from an Iowa regiment named John T. Shaw and they were married on June 10, 1866 in Wapella. They lived with Eveline for a few years in Wapella before moving to Minnesota to farm. John and Mary had two sons, William and Thomas and a daughter Eva who later married a John Barrans. Mary and Eveline carried on their tradition of letter writing and kept up an active correspondence over the years. John was much more brief in his correspondence. When prompted by Mary to write a note to his mother-in-law, John wrote, "Well Mother--- I have not a dogoned bit of news to write only that the first man that comes along and offers me two thousand dollars for my farm can have it. That's all.

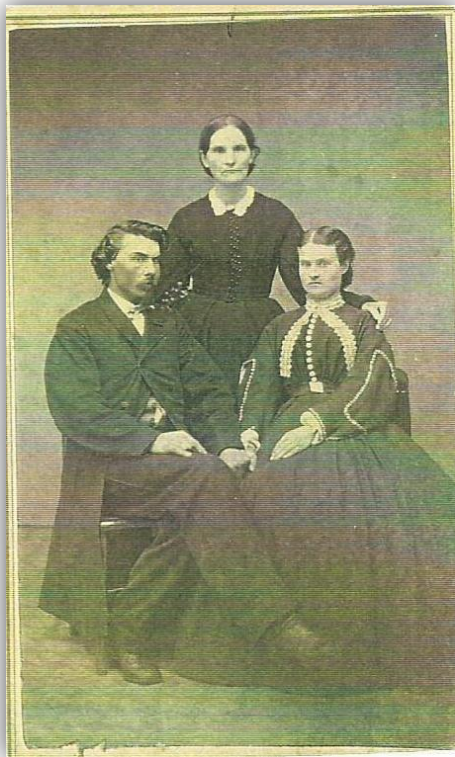
From John." John would later write a history of his

involvement in the Civil War which was rather extensive and included several major battles. His history took on the same brevity as his note to Eveline, consisting of a half page to describe his four years of lengthy service.

John Shaw must've found that man who offered \$2000 for his farm in Minnesota and over the next several years bought two more farms in Iowa before finally settling in Lenox, Iowa. He gave up on the idea of farming and took up the trade of painting and wall papering and eventually built up a successful business.

Even after many years had passed, Eveline and Mary did not forget about William. Mary wrote to her mother in 1891, "I have sent Billy Bryant's Picture away to get a large size all Framed so come see it." They held onto his memory in another way too. In one of the letters Mary had written to her brother, she confided, "Billy when you write A long letter to us we sques the letter half A dozen times to get more out." Mary had carefully kept all of Billy's correspondence and undoubtedly 'squeezed' them over the years to remember her well-loved brother. These same letters were stored in a box in a farm house attic and years later all of us are able to benefit from William's memory.

After building their large brick hotel and machine shop in Wapella, the Central Illinois Railroad decided that the neighboring town of Clinton would be a better location to centralize and moved their enterprise there. Wapella never became the town of opportunity many had



John T. Shaw and Mary Jane. Eveline is standing

hoped though it has increased in population by 100 people over the past 150 years.

Eveline eventually left Wapella and moved to Lenox to live with John and Mary in her later years. She passed away on March 14, 1912 at the age of 92. John and Mary Jane remained in Lenox and were well respected in their community. Mary Jane lived to be 85 before passing in 1926 and John lived to be 97, passing in 1936. Some of their descendants still reside in Lenox, Iowa.

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A special thanks to the Notz family of Lenox, Iowa, for sharing the letters with Jan and Eloise and to Robin Biddle, a descendant of Philip Gossard, for providing supplementary information about the 107th Illinois Regiment. Other sources were from Ancestry.com, Fold3.com and numerous sites on the Internet including histories of DeWitt Co., Illinois and Taylor Co., Iowa.

Nov 25th / 60s
New Elizabethton Camp, Valin North
Dear Sister
I am well at present
and hope this will find you the
same I hope that Mother is getting
well I have not received your
letters from you that I suppose that
they have been ~~sent~~ carried I have
written four letters and have not
received but two letters in answer
but I suppose you have answered them
all well we will have to go
I am still carrying the mail from
here to Elizabethton on horse back
I was riding a ~~good~~ horse and the
saddle hurt his back so I had to
take a mule that never had been
rode before and of all the cutting
up monkey shins you ever seen the mule
I had to ride on the horse but

← (1860's)

William Bryant

Portion of a letter written by William Bryant to his sister Mary