

150 Years: Remembering Worst Civil War Battle on Missouri Soil

Over the next few weeks, the Shelby County Herald will be remembering the horrific Centralia Battle in which many Shelby County men lost their lives. On September 13 and 14, there was a reenactment of the battle in Centralia. More information can be found at www.centraliabattlefield.com/#reenactment.

by Corby Cochenour
Herald Reporter
Murray Letters

James Finley and Ann Jane (Shannon) Murray ran a store in Philadelphia, Pa., after their marriage. The store burned and they moved west with the first stop being West Ely. He taught one term at the college there before moving on to Sharpsburg. He was a poor farmer and after failing at farming, they moved to Ribbon Ridge, north of Hunnewell. He taught school in the winter and in the summer he helped run a store at Kendall. He helped auditing books at Hunnewell and was a justice of the peace. He was called Squire, Murray.

James and Ann had nine children. Their son John Murray and their son-in-law, William Shelton, who was married to Susan, both fought in the Centralia Battle and survived. John Murray enlisted in Co. 39th Regiment Missouri Infantry on August 13, 1864. He was mustered in on September 8, 1864 as a Union soldier. He was described as 5 feet 10 inches tall with blue eyes, auburn hair and light complexion. He was 27 years old.

He was discharged or mustered out of service July 19, 1865 and married Harriet Hubbard June 6, 1866. She was the fourth child of Charles Hubbard and Sarah Ann (Sanders) Hubbard.

After the Centralia Battle, Johns troupe train passed through Hunnewell in January 1865 and many of his regiment had measles and whole families were infected. Both John and his brother-in-law William Shelton had measles and were in the USA General Hospital in Nashville, Tennessee.

Although William survived the battle he lost his life a few months later on January 13, 1865. His cause of death was complications of measles.

After the battle, James F. Murray wrote letters to the boys that can summarize the emotions of family members at home.

The first was dated October 1, 1864:

My Dear Children (John Murray and son-in-law William Shelton),

It was with a heart of thankfulness that I read your letter which I received yesterday evening when we learned that you had both escaped the terrible massacre that befel your company. It was alone through the mercies of an overruling Providence that placed you in charge of the wagons and thus saved your lives whilst your comrades have been killed. I believe it was through prayers of your family which is offered daily for you that you were saved. I want you to consider that whilst you are living far from God your old Father and Sisters are praying daily that God would protect you from the shafts of the enemy and cause you to see the errors of your ways and turn to God and seek the salvation of your never dying souls before it be forever too late. Oh that the joyful news would arrive to us that you had both turned to God and became followers of the meek and lowly Jesus, then come life or death all would be well with you. I think you are mistaken about the death of Lieutenant Janes (Thomas B.) as he wrote a letter to his wife the day after the fight and he was in Macon City. He wrote that fifty-four of his company fell but did not mention no names. We were all very much afflicted and troubled you may be sure. F. See came over yesterday evening. He saw Mrs. Durbin who told him you both were in Paris, but she knew nothing of Mr. Labus (Anthony), and there was much grieving when your letter arrived and told of his death. I still hope that he may yet be alive and well as he was a good

neighbor and was much respected by us all. I shall not write to his Uncle until I learn further from him. Did he receive my letters? If he has left anything send them to Hunnewell. If he is dead I will try and get the body and bury it at Sherrys (Cemetery) where it is said Wm Trussell will be laid today as his father went after him yesterday. I have just recovered from an attack of bilious diarrhea. I am not stout yet but quite feeble, we will do the best we can for Susan. Word was sent to her yesterday of your safety. We have put your beans in the tobacco house and got part of them out. I think there will be four or five bushels. We are nearly done cutting corn. The frost injured the tobacco and corn-some. Your mother and Josephine went to Hunnewell with F. See yesterday. The rest are well and send their love to you both. Write when you get this letter and let us know if you have heard any thing more from Mr. Labus and all the particulars of his death. I am getting tired and must close as Robert Henry is waiting to take the letter. So no more at present but ever remain your affectionate Father until death.

James F. Murray.

The second letter was dated January 31, 1865 and was sent to John after the death of William.

My Dear Son,
I received your letter January 25th this morning and was thankful to learn that the Lord had spared your life and that you arrived safe in St. Louis. I received a letter from you from the hospital in Nashville and answered it the same day. That was two weeks ago last Saturday. I am sorry that you did not receive it as I have been waiting very anxious for an answer as we was much troubled on your account. We received a letter from Nashville informing us of the death of William and how Susan would have to proceed to obtain his effects. An inventory of his clothing but says nothing about his over coat, fatigue coat or shirts. Do you know what became of them? Poor Susan is almost beside herself. God only knows what will become of her and her poor little children. They staid with us last week. I am sorry that you are still unwell. Do not expose yourself and try and obtain leave to come

home immediately to recruit your health as I am afraid you are worse off than you say your are. Have you much of a cough? The times are peaceable about here and there is no bushwhacking as I know of some militia are still at Shelbyville. It has been very cold for the past week but little snow. It has been more moderate for the last two days. Your regiment, when they passed through Hunnewell infected the whole neighborhood with measles. Henry Hubbard was in the (railroad) cars and took them and the family took them from him. The following families have got them, John Meads, Fountain Howe, John Howe, Samuel Howe, Geo Mayes, R.K. Mayes, Jas Mayes, Burditts, Parvens, Sherrys, Rhoads, Clarksons, Rodgers, and Thompson, Barnetts. Robert Henry, Frank and Eliza Catherine have got them. Eliza went home with Susan and is still there. She was doing well yesterday. We have not heard today from her but will send down this evening. They have all broke our well. Robert and Frank are both able to set up and are much better. Robert has a bad cough. I am afraid Hannah, Annie and James will take them and also Susan's children. I may take them myself. I am quite poorly with my old complaints. We received a letter from Josephine last week. She and Grant was well. She is very anxious about you. She intends coming home as soon as the river is free of ice. F. See was here this morning. His family are well. Henry Dill buried his wife on Christmas day. Sam Haifer and family starts for Nebraska in a few days. Lieut Janes' wife has a young Lieut and is doing well. Wish him much joy for me. I have not received your warrant for bounty yet. It was not ready when I sent for it. In the letter I wrote you at Nashville I exhorted you and William to seek the Lord and to put your trust in Him for all future blessings but poor William was gone before I wrote as his physician says he died on the 13th. I now again exhort you to ask yourself the question why am I spared

whilst my brother was taken from his wife and children and may the goodness of God in sparing your life and His providential care over you all your life lead you to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ so that come life or death, sickness or health you will have a friend by you that sticketh closer than a brother, and may God incline your heart to seek Him. Do not say that tomorrow will be as today yet more abundant for we know not what a day may bring forth for two of our family has already gone since the rebellion broke out and written widow on your sisters and orphans on their children. Who will be the next, God only knows. It may be myself or it may be you or some one else of the family but whoever it may be may we be able to say, "I have fought the good fight." I have finished my course and hence forth there is laid up for me a crown of glory which the Lord will give to me. De you know anything of Williams last moments. If he appeared willing and prepared to know and so are well. We all send our love to you. Write as soon as you get this and come home as soon as you can and may God bless and protect you is the prayer of your affectionate father.

James F. Murray
Connections

In an interesting connection, Luke Farrell, Shannon Farrell and Nicole Roth, children of David and DeAnn, Shelbina, are descendants of two soldiers from the Centralia Battle, John Christine and John Murray. DeAnn's mothers parents were Roy and Virginia Christine and David's mother, Doris Farrell is the daughter of Sidney (Jack) Howard and Louise Murray.

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