

# 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](http://www.centraliabattlefield.com/#reenactment).



Thomas Benjamin James is pictured above, second one from the left in the front, holding his grandson, Joseph William Weber, born 1915 and died in 1962. Also pictured, left to right: Harriet Jane Higgins, James, Lucretia Adeline Mayes (James second wife) and Sarah Hugins Dennison. Back row: William Wilford Webber, son of Harriet Jane Higgins; his wife, Genora Roxana Dennison, daughter of Sarah Dennison, Elizabeth Montgomery, wife of James son, Joseph William James (not pictured); Olga Bernice James, daughter of Joseph William James and Elizabeth Montgomery; and her husband, Henry Webber, son of Genora Roxana Dennison and William Wilford Weber. Henry and Olga are parents of the baby, Joseph William Webber.

by Corby Cochenour  
Herald Reporter

Thomas Benjamin James was a 1st Lt. in Company G 39 Infantry, Missouri Volunteers, and was at the Centralia Battle, but survived due to the swiftness of his horse. It has been said, not confirmed, that he stole the horse he rode away on from the Greenwell family near

Lakenan.

He joined the Union Army on September 14, 1864 and mustered out on July 19, 1865. Afterwards, he returned to Shelby County until his death in June of 1919. He contracted measles during the war and was in Benton Barracks during that time. He lived with the effects of this

Before James served his country, he had quite an intriguing story that has been passed down over the years. He was a native of Kentucky born on November 2, 1832 to John H. James and Henrietta Gibbs. His family moved to Missouri in 1851 and originally settled in Marion County.

Family stories state that James and his father, John had a disagreement about James leaving the Catholic Church. His father wanted him to be a Priest, but he refused. He left the Catholic Church and also left his father's political party and became a Republican.

This was not the first disagreement between father and son. James filed a complaint against his father in 1856 stating that his father had promised to give all of his children \$400 and he wanted his money. John James stated that he did not intend to give the money until his death and he felt it wasn't a good idea, since James was still a minor, and with his inexperience with the use of money.

James' father told him that if he would settle and work a certain 60 acres of land, he would deed the prairie land to him at a later date. James continued to displease his father with his re-

ligious and political views and John served his son with a notice to leave the land. James would not leave the land and made a motion to continue his cause on February 27, 1857. This went on four more times during the year. On December 30, 1857, James dismissed his suit.

James married Hulda Buzzard on July 27, 1852. They had three children born of the marriage, Mary Frances (Fannie) James, born October 10, 1854 and married William Henry Howe on March 3, 1874. She passed away on May 4, 1922.

John Labon James was born March 31, 1857. He died on August 10, 1888. Sarah Katherine (Kittie) James was born on June 28, 1858 and she married Frank Hudson.

Interesting stories have been told about the marriage of James and Hulda, but the one that the family has passed down, stated that Hulda left with the hired hand, Oscar Smith. James was angry and swore he would kill them both and went after them. When they got to New Market, due south of Philadelphia, they were able to get a fresh horse and James couldn't find them and gave up the search.

James married Lucretia Adeline Mayes on December 15, 1863. She was born June 27, 1863 and died March 3, 1923. She was the daughter of Robert Kennedy Mayes and Drusilla Davis, of Shelby County. Two children were born of the marriage.

Joseph William (Willy) James was born January 23, 1865, while James was still in the service. He married Elizabeth Montgomery in 1886. She was the daughter of William Montgomery and Julia A. Joseph James passed away March 25, 1908.

James Thomas James was born on August 17, 1870 and died December 4, 1908. He is buried at the IOOF Cemetery at Hunnewell. He married Salome C Myers on February 26, 1890. She died February 16, 1891. His second wife was Elizabeth (Bettie) Ellen Rennolds, daughter of John Thomas Rennolds and Elizabeth Ann Merredith. She died December 19, 1949 in Shelbina and is buried at the Hunnewell City Cemetery.

Golda V. Howe's "History of Shelby County", written around 1911, described James at that time as one "who is well and favorable known all over the county, and is everywhere esteemed as an upright and progressive citizen." During his latter years, he resided in the Lakenan area. He is buried at Prairie View.

Thomas Benjamin James lived an interesting life and was well respected in the community. All of the soldiers who were part of the worst battle in history had lives before they enlisted, lives that one may never know of unless it has been recorded and passed down through history. Some had very short lives, ending at Centralia, while others came back home and tried to move past the horrific things their eyes had seen during the war. Either way, these men, like so many men and women that serve today, are heroes and deserve to be remembered.