

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 or at the Shelby County Historical Society.

Spires

Robert Spires was only 25 when he joined Co G 39 reg't Missouri Infantry. He had a fair complexion with light hair and blue eyes. He stood 5' 11 1/2 inches tall. He enlisted on August 29, 1864 in Shelbyville and was mustered in on September 8, 1864. He lost his life on September 27, 1864 during the bloody Battle of Centralia.

To learn of a family memory's death is heart wrenching enough, but the Spires family had already faced immense tragedy before the Centralia battle.

On March 28, 1862, William G. Spires, brother of Robert, sent the following letter to The *Paris Mercury*: I take the liberty of addressing you in hopes that through the medium of your respectable journal, we may procure such information as may alleviate the feelings of our very distressed family. On the 18th of this month, a party of some eight armed men entered our house, and in my absence, took down two guns; they ransacked every part of our dwelling, looking as they said for arms an ammunition, pulling out the drawers, searching under and in the beds, opening several pocket books, and rifling them of such documents and change as suited them; they then went down to the stable, from which they took a young riding horse which belonged to my deceased brother; they then prepared to depart, taking with them the horse, saddle

and bridle, two fowling pieces, powder horn, etc, an epaulet and feather and sword, which belonged to my father when he had a command in Kentucky; and also a little money which was in the pocket book. On departing, they swore two men, my brother and a fence maker, that they should not leave the premises until they gave them leave. And on my father, refusing to accompany them, one of the men presented his gun and threatened to shoot him if he resisted. They have been gone now nearly two weeks, and we have not heard any account of my father's situation. The report of the men who were dispatched from this neighborhood in search of him leave us to suspect that my father is no longer in existence. Now the object of this is to induce some person, who may know something of the movements of the men referred to, to give such information, by letter or otherwise, as may have a tendency to alleviate the sufferings of our distressed family. My father, when he left home, had on a light brown coat and pantaloons, a gray overcoat, black hat, and a boot on one leg and a shoe on the other foot; he is rather tall in stature, a little thin, with a pleasant countenance, and aged about 59-60 years. Any information concerning him addressed to the undersigned at Clarence, Shelby County, Missouri, will be gratefully received.

On April 30, 1862, *The Missouri Gazette* reported that Hen-

ry Spires body was found near Woodlawn in the northeast part of Randolph County. It looked as if he had been dead two or three weeks, and it was not improbable that he was murdered the same day he was carried away by the band of succession outlaws.

Before Henry's death, Rhoda, his wife, and he had already lost Zachariah on May 8, 1859 when he was only 17 and Martin on February 20, 1862 at the age of 28. At the time of the home invasion, Jonathan, who was 24 with a ruddy complexion, brown hair and blue eyes, was in the army. He had enlisted on December 18, 1861. He was killed in action at Lone Jack, Jackson County, Missouri on August 16, 1862. Delilah Spires also died as a teenager on October 25, 1862.

One can be sure that the year of 1862 would be one the rest of the family including siblings Thomas, Rebecca E, and William G would want to forget.

Then two years later, September 27, 1864, Robert lost his life at Centralia.

Some of the family is buried at the Kyle Family Cemetery, 5 1/4 miles south of Clarence off of 151.

Evans

Mary C. Evans died at her home in Leonard on January 24, 1894. She was the daughter of Samuel and Sarah E. Vernon. She lost her parents at a young age and the siblings cured for each other. On February 2, 1860, she married Eleazor Evans and took on the responsibility of his three children from his previous marriage.

She and Eleazar had three children, George W., Eleazar and Malinda, who later married B. T. Perry. Before Mrs. Evans passing, she lost both sons as young adults and lost her husband in the Battle of Centralia.

Eleazor Evans had a sandy complexion with blue eyes and black hair. On September 15, 1852, he married Mealinda Walker. They had three children, Samuel Jesse Evans, born January 11, 1855; Mary Elizabeth Evans and Halinda Evans, born January 14, 1857. His wife, Mealinda, died on September 22, 1858.

He then married Mary C. in 1860. At the age of 36 on August 15, 1864 he enlisted at Shelbyville. He was mustered in on September 8, 1864 and lost his life in the Battle of Centralia on September 24, 1864, leaving behind his wife and six children.

Mary did not remarry and in November, 1867, Samuel Greenfield, who lost his son at Centralia, took custody of the children of Eleazor and Mealinda.

Dunbar

Homer M. Dunbar was only 19 when he enlisted on August 12, 1864. He had a fair complexion with light hair and grey eyes. He stood at five feet eight inches. He was mustered in on September 8 and lost his life on September 27. He only served as a private for 47 days.

His father was a doctor in Shelby County. Dr. H. W. Dunbar delivered Mary Eliza, daughter of Eleazor Evans.

Shelby County in the 1800's must have had the same feeling as it does today, where everyone knew their neighbors. The loss of life from the Centralia Battle had to affect Shelby County in ways we could never imagine. Children left without fathers, wives left without husbands, parents left without children. The pain that swept through this area must have been overwhelming, but the strength and resolve of those left, to carry on, is amazing. In the next few weeks, the *Shelby County Herald* will continue to explore the tragedy these families endured.