

# NewsLetter

Benton County Genealogical Society

Volume Thirteen

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February 1999



## Experiences of a Union Soldier in the Civil War



[continued from January 1999 issue]

After a night at Lynchburg, we started again and reached Danville without accident and here I saw the first victim of the home guard. We were put into an old tobacco warehouse, three stories high, without any warning about the rules. We had been there but a few minutes when one poor fellow stared for the window to look about a little, but before he reached it, we heard the crack of a rifle and he fell dead with a bullet in his forehead. To show the murderous disposition of the wretch who killed him, I will say that in order to hit him, he had to fire so close to the bottom of the window that the wall cut its bigness out of the sill. He could not wait to see if he was coming to the window, but fires the instant he could see the top of his head. It was nothing uncommon to hear the guards say as they were relieving each other that they would kill a yank before their turn was over. Of course the sight of a dead soldier was nothing new, but it is one thing to see men killed in battle and another one to see them shut up and shot down like pigs in a pen, and our feelings were not the most cheerful. We got used to it after a short time and it occasioned no surprise to see a man or so killed.

We were two days I think on the road from Lynchburg to Danville and had drawn no rations since the hardtack, so we were getting a little hungry. If my memory is correct, we stayed but a night in Danville and then took the road for Saulsburg and after a short stop went on to Charlotte. We made slow time for the roads were crowded with trains loaded with troops and supplies for the army, so were four and a half days reaching Charlotte from Lynchburg. Here we got our first rations after leaving Lynchburg, a pint of raw cornmeal each served to us on the cars. The most of us by this time had been robbed of our cups, plates, and everything of the sort and were obliged to take our meal in our caps or pockets, and were glad enough to get it that way. Of course, we had no way of cooking it, but that didn't trouble us much. We soon got sick of it.

From Charlotte we went to Columbia, and after waiting some little time, moved on to Augusta. Here we met a lot of old troops on their way to join Lee, and our guards got into a red hot argument with them about abusing prisoners. It looked for a time as though it would end in a fight, but the home guards evidently thought it would be as much fun to shoot a few unarmed prisoners as to try it on men who were liable to shoot back, besides being so much safer.

I think we stayed in Augusta about half a day and we were a great show to the citizens. Great numbers of them crowded around the train, many of them ladies and children who had never seen a Yankee before and were greatly surprised that we looked much like other men. They were very talkative and not very abusive.

From Augusta we went on to Macon which we reached in four and a half days from Charlotte. Here we got about a pound and a half of corn bread each and the meal it was made from was coarse and unsifted, we were truly thankful for it. I don't know that bread ever tasted better to us than

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### Program 13 February Museum Director Bill Lewis

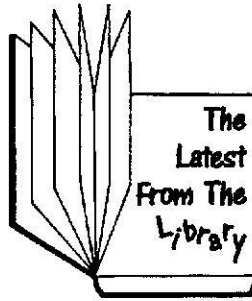
This month's program will feature Bill Lewis, Museum Director. This is your chance to learn more about the inner workings of our Benton County Historical Museum. There are lots of interesting twists in a museum and opportunities to get involved. You might even get a few details on the new building that is planned.

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that did, it being four and a half days since we had anything to eat and nine days with only a pint of raw corn meal. We stopped here for an hour or two and then pulled on for the paradise of the home guards, Andersonville, which place we reached about ten o'clock in the morning.

Here we left the railroad and marched about a half mile to the stockade. And now I wish that an abler pen than mine might tell the rest of the story for I find myself utterly unable to explain the horrors of the first sight I got of the poor fellows inside that terrible stockade. I thought we had suffered all that men could bear and live, but I realized on the instant that our sufferings were good fun to what was in store for us, and I was not mistaken. I wish I could tell you so that you could realize the perfectly awful looks of the wretched beings, you could not call them men, that crowded round us in hopes to hear from friends or perhaps from home. And you must recollect that the first ones we saw were the strongest and most robust in the camp. Imagine, if you can, eight or ten thousand men in the very last stages of consumption, clothed in rags, swarming with vermin, nearly every one of them bareheaded and barefooted, covered with dirt, so poor that you expected at every step to see them fall to pieces, and you have a faint idea, and a very faint one too, of what we saw that morning as we through the gates marched and found ourselves in Andersonville. I think that the shock of that first sight of the unfortunate inmates of the stockade deadened my sensibilities and left me with only one thought, the sullen, dogged determination to live through it and, if the chance ever offered, to pay the debt with interest. I am glad to say that I have never met with any of the prison guards to my knowledge and all desire for vengeance has long since left me.

After being turned loose in the pen, I was assigned to a company for the purpose of drawing rations; rather a useless proceeding for the rations were so seldom drawn that we would have hardly missed them if stopped all together. As soon as I was at liberty, I started like a soldier to see that the thing was made of and to find out if there was anyone there that I knew, or that knew me, or knew anyone that I knew. There was at this time, May 1864, about 32 or 33 thousand men confined in Andersonville, but by a liberal use of my jaw talking, I found in less than an hour several men from my own town and neighborhood. To one of them, George Howe, of Stockbridge, Wisconsin, I without a doubt owe my life. I believe he has relatives in Darrel. He was at that time in the



The Atlantic Bridge to Germany, Vol. X  
CD - FTM - Marriage Index: Missouri, 1851-1900  
Primal Families of the Yellow Creek Valley -  
(middleTennessee Counties)  
CDs (8) - FHRF - Vital Records Index North America -1631-1888  
The Quit Rents of Virginia, 1704, by Smith\*  
Discovering Your Heritage, by Eichholz\*  
Write It Right, by Barnes and Lackey\*  
Scotch-Irish Family Research Made Simple, by

Campbell\*  
On Oral History Primer, for Tape-recording Personal and Family Histories\*  
Guidelines for Genealogical Writing (NEHGS)\*  
CDs (5) - Vital Records Index, British Isles (1538-1868)

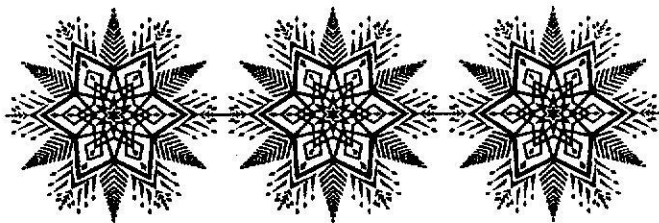
\*Gifts of Damaris Reynolds  
by Jean B. Grube, Librarian

prime of life, a man of iron with the grit and tenacity of a bulldog, and yet so big-hearted that he was always ready to share his rations with those worse off than himself. The first thing he asked me was, "Have you had dinner?", and insisted that I share his meal with him before he would hear the news from home. He had been a prisoner at this time for eight months and his advice was worth everything to me, when captured like all of Father Abraham's boys.

I was comfortably clothed and well provided with tent, blankets, etc. when I arrived at Andersonville. Through the urgent solicitation of the rebels in the shape of cocked pistols and sundry sabre cuts, I had parted with tent, blankets, shoes, hat, coat, in short everything but shirt and pants. They had such taking ways with them that it was hard to keep our shirts and many of us didn't, but I was fortunate in this and was well-clothed compared with thousands of my comrades.

I suppose most of you are familiar with the plan of Andersonville. The stockade was nearly square, a little longer from the north to south. It was situated on both sides of a swamp and on two small hills and contained about twelve acres at the time that I entered it but was afterwards enlarged four acres on the north end. The swamp contained about 4 to 6 [corrected from 486] acres and was crossed near the center by a small brook. The ground of the swamp was so soft that it was perfectly impassable except by two small foot paths thrown up by the prisoners, one at each end of the swamp. After the stockade was enlarged, there was about 8 or 9 acres fit for use (for the dead line took up about twenty feet all round the camp) and on this there were, most of the summer of 1864, from 30 to 38 thousand men, huddled together like bees. The brook could be reached in two or three places from the south side, but from the north side could be reached only from the foot paths. And, as these were narrow and close to the dead line, it was taking your life in your hand to attempt to cross it, if there was the least crowd, for whether a man fell or was crowded, if he got near enough to the dead line for a guard to see any part of him under it, though he might be five or six feet distant from the line, he was killed on the instant. It was an everyday matter that we now got accustomed to. A great many were killed getting water

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as the brook furnished the only supply for many of the prisoners and was the only supply for washing or bathing that any of us had.

Several wells were dug soon after I entered the stockade, but it was a serious task to dig one. Our only tools were tin plates made by melting a canteen in two pieces and a bucket made of a boot leg with a wooden bottom. This also served to draw the water after the well was dug. Some of the wells that I remember were 50 feet, and many of them were 75 feet deep. You can imagine the labor it cost us to dig one. We had no rope, chain, or windlass. Only one man could dig at a time, and he was drawn up and let down by main strength with a string made by cutting up bootlegs and tying them together with our suspenders until it got long enough. The only thing we had plenty of was time and men. The lightest of us worked in the well and the others on top. There was not many of us fat enough to weigh very heavy, which helped us some. The brook might have furnished an abundant supply of water for us all but with their usual kindness the rebels had located their camp sinks and stables along its banks, and it was fairly reeking with filth and did its full share of killing yankees, as it was no doubt intended to.

The stockade was guarded by sentries in boxes on top of the wall every few rods and by a battery at each of three corners, southwest, northwest, and northeast. Every morning soon after guard mounting, Major Wertz, the camp commander would gallop round the stockade with his hounds looking for the track of escaped yankees, and woe to the poor wretch they got after, unless they could reach a tree. For some time after I got there, it was his custom to put a ball and chain on each one he caught trying to escape, but after awhile he changed his tactics and gave each one an extra ration and sometimes even a blanket or some article of clothing. I suppose he enjoyed the hunt and did it to induce us to try to get away. He was a man of terrible temper and, having unlimited power, was apt to make it uncomfortable for those of us who offended him.

I made my stopping place with George Howe, and life went on something after this fashion: every morning before it got too hot we went to the brook and bathed for about an hour, then, if we had anything to eat, we had dinner. Our rations were for the most part, corn meal, of which we got from a half pint to a pint each... sometimes every day, but often not for two or three days. Occasionally we got a spoonful of salt, and now and then a piece of bacon. The largest ration of bacon I ever saw was not larger than three fingers of a small hand, and I don't remember that I ever saw a piece inside the stockade that was not alive with vermin. I am afraid that we were not very fastidious, for I never saw a ration refused. A few times, we

got a fresh piece of beef. I remember trading a prisoner rations of corn bread for a beef's skull. He had drawn it and didn't know what to do with it as all the meat had been cut off from it that was possible. But I had been there long enough to appreciate it, and Howe and myself and four others made a Fourth of July dinner that was, I think, enjoyed the most of any meal I ate while south.

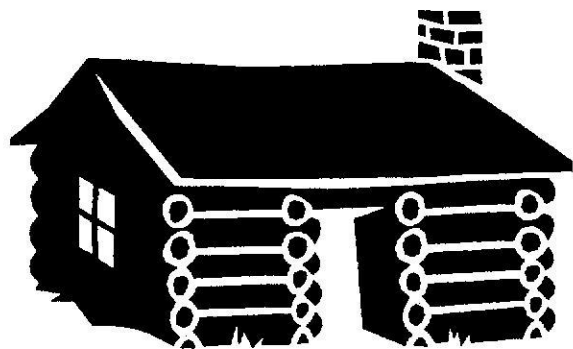
We sometimes got a mess of what the rebs called "cow peas", a sort of half pea, half bean that, well cleaned and cooked, might have been a fair substitute for beans, but they were brought to the cook right from the thresher without any cleaning of any kind and shovelled into gunny sacks, thrown into wagons and drawn into camp and thrown into heaps on the sand, so that by the time we got them, they were at least half dirt. Once in a while we got them raw and then, if we had wood to cook them with, we thought ourselves well off indeed.

At one time they fed us on mush made after a rule of their own that, for speed and care, can't be beat. I cannot say that it improves the quality of the mush. They took a lot of pine boxes, put eight or ten bushels of meal in each one, and poured a few pails of hot water over it and the thing was done, the flavor of the pine answering in place of salt.

After dinner we went about the business of the day. Such of us as had combs were greatly to be envied, for the ground even was alive with fleas and that terror of the yankee soldier, the greyback. After combing our hair clean as possible, every particle of clothing had to be examined and cleared from the pests as well as possible, and this was our most important business. If the morning bath, foul as it was, and the after cleaning of hair and clothing was neglected for even a few days, the poor wretch was gone for, sure as fate, and I am almost prepared to say that there was no man who was there any length of time who lived a week after neglecting the bath and comb. It may seem incredible to you, and it is not an agreeable subject to talk about, but I have seen men's hair cut when it was so alive with vermin that the blood would run from the shears and form great pools on the ground, and this not once but hundreds of times. Living as a great many were obliged to, in what we called gopher holes without a particle of bedding, you can imagine that it was something of a task to keep up even a pretense of cleanliness. Under this treatment, the yankees wilted fast, and it was nothing uncommon to see a row of dead men five or six rods long waiting at the gate in the morning for the dead wagon. Nor was it anything unusual to see a man drop and die in the street anywhere. It was impossible to go fifty yards in any direction without seeing more or less dying men. It was a common thing to lie down at night with five or six men and find two or three of them dead in the morning. If this sounds incredible, let the thousands of Union graves at Andersonville bear witness whether it be true or false.

TO BE CONTINUED IN MARCH 1999.

Note: This humble typist has read MacKinlay Kantor's great book *Andersonville*, but NOW I think I understand how anyone survived in that hellhole.——Dorothy



### Membership Information

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2nd Vice Pres	Charlene Talbot	929-6079
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	Jbarc@pioneer.net	847-5610

Dues are \$10.00 single and \$13.00 family per calendar year.  
Dues paid after September 1st are credited to next year.

Web page URL <http://www.rootsweb.com/~orbentgs/>

The Benton County Genealogical Society will buy your used genealogy CDs for 1/2 their purchase price! CDs will be placed in our collection. After you've used it, sell it to us!

### Canadian Interest Group

The Canadian Interest Group is for those searching for their roots in Canada. This group meets the third Tuesday of each month, from 12:30 to 3:30 p.m. at the Albany Public Library. If you have a specific area of Canada you are interested in, please let me know so we can have books and printed materials there for you to look at. We have resources available for Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and some Quebec plus Canada in General. Car pooling can be arranged.

Call Pat Rawlinson, 752-2243, for further info.

### Odds And Ends

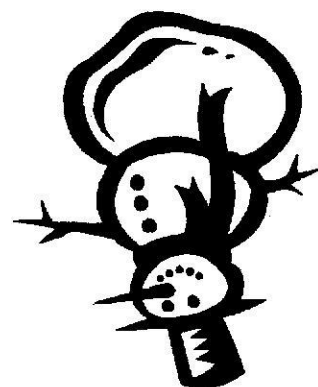
Our number at the OSU Thriftshop on Second Street in Corvallis is 492. Please keep your Santiam and Flav-R-Pak labels coming in to the Library. There is a plastic sack in the library to keep them in. Leila Crawford is in charge of the label program. All you need is the UPC Symbol from the label. Be sure that you leave some area around the label when you tear it off.

### More Member Info

Our meetings are held on the second Saturday of September through June, in the NE Dining Hall of the College United Methodist Church, on the east side of the parking lot, in the 1100 block of Philomath. Business meeting is at 10:00 a.m. with the program at 11:00 a.m.

Our Library, in the museum annex, is open to members and visitors on meeting days from 12:00 noon, or when the program is over until 3:00 p.m. IF we can keep enough volunteer librarians, it will be open every Tuesday afternoon from 12:30 until 3:00 p.m.

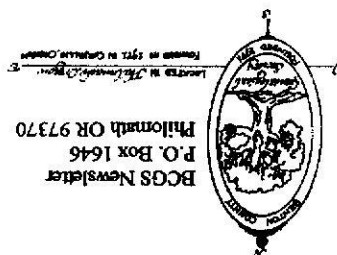
Members in good standing may check out up to five books and return books any time the library is open.



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S=Single; F=Family; E=Exchange.  
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### Mailing Label Coding



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