

The story of Jabez and James Blythe (pronounced Bly) has been documented on numerous occasions. It tells that the brothers fought on opposite sides in the Civil War, but safely returned to Walworth to live the remainder of their lives. The brothers and their families are buried in two of our cemeteries.

A Request for Information

Tracing a family's roots has become a popular hobby and the Walworth Historical Society frequently receives genealogy requests for information about families who lived here years ago. One such request was recently sent to Town Historian Gene Bavis from Julie Quinn Blyth, a student at Wayne Central School when Gene was her 7th grade social studies teacher. Julie's parents, William and Joan Quinn, lived on Furnace Road in Ontario; Bill was a member of the Board of Education at WCS for many years in the 1980's and early 1990's. He and Joan later returned to the Buffalo area, where Bill died about six years ago.

Julie's husband, James, is a distant relative of the Blythe brothers, although the family does not know when the "e" was dropped from their last name. James and Julie grew up in this area a few miles apart but didn't meet until 1985 in Japan where they were exchange students. Julie was sponsored by the Rotary Club of Ontario/Walworth. James, Julie, and their 11 year old son, Henry, have lived in Lexington, KY, for almost 15 years. Henry is focusing on the Blythe connection for a history assignment at school.

Prior to their visit, Julie asked the Walworth Historical Society if we had information about the Blyth(e) family. Our filing system produced a quantity of historical information which was mailed to them. One of their goals during their trip was to locate the graves of James (Walworth Cemetery on Sherburne Road) and Jabez (Baker Road Cemetery on Route 441). WHS member Bob Mogray and his family toured the two cemeteries, found their graves, and provided their burial sites to the Blyths. Bob also photographed the headstones for our museum files.

A Visit to the Walworth Area

The Kentucky Blyths traveled to the Walworth area the weekend of October 13 and 14 to visit James' parents, John E. and Joanna (Jennings) Blyth who live in Gananda and are graduates of Macedon Academy. James began school at Pal-Mac, but graduated from Gananda in 1985. John's father, Ray Blyth, owned the Craggs Roller Mills on Walworth-Palmyra Road in the late 1920's and sold it to Peter Balzar in 1930. John told his family that the original James Blythe family emigrated from York, England, to Pultneyville in the earlier part of the 1800's. They were land speculators and the promise of vast amounts of available acreage in America was their incentive to leave England. Seventeen years ago, James and Julie visited the original homestead in a village near York.

Jabez and the Union Blue

At the age of 23, Jabez Blythe enlisted in 1863 and joined Company B 9th Regiment New York Heavy Artillery. In June of 1865, two months after the War Between the States officially ended at Appomattox Court House, Private Jabez Blythe proudly returned home to Walworth, where he had lived since the age of 5. He had been shot in his right elbow during the Union's successful battle at Winchester, VA, in 1864, and spent recovery time at a hospital in Philadelphia. Soon after his return home to Walworth, he married Emma J. Mason in the Walworth Methodist Episcopal Church on December 12, 1865. Within ten years they had three daughters, but only the last – Lottie – born in 1875 - lived beyond the age of 4.

Jabez and Emma lived in Walworth for a time until they moved to Orleans, NY, where he operated a flour mill with his brother, Joseph. They later lived in Rochester but eventually returned to Walworth for their remaining years. Jabez died on October 13, 1898; ironically the Kentucky Blyths visited the cemetery on the same day – 114 years later! Jabez is buried in Baker Road Cemetery beside his two little daughters; they were joined in time by Emma. Nearby is the Mason family plot. It is not known where Lottie is buried.

James and the Confederate Grey

James Blythe - 16 years older than Jabez - was the first of the two brothers to come to America. He lived briefly in Niagara County, NY, before wandering south to Mississippi. He settled in Biloxi, married Louisa - a wealthy Southern belle - and was a successful businessman, serving as chief of police, postmaster, and proprietor of a general store. In 1861 at the age of 37 he enlisted in Company A 3rd Regiment Mississippi Infantry of the Confederate States of America where he earned the rank of sergeant. James was captured and was a prisoner of war for nearly a year at a Yankee parole camp in Alabama.

When the war ended and James returned to Biloxi, he discovered the area had suffered greatly from the war and from the Yankees. The Blythes were financially ruined; all the family had left of their prosperity was a trunk full of worthless Confederate money and little else. Their home, furnishings, slaves, the family silver – all were gone. James, his wife Louisa, and their little girl Caroline moved to Walworth to be near other relatives so James could work at a local flour mill. It was a difficult transition for Louisa, who was used to being pampered and living in luxury. In 1868 James and Louisa had a son named Willis. During Henry's recent visit with his grandparents, he interviewed his grandfather for a school history project. John remembered Willis Blyth, who was called Bucky by his family and died a

very poor man. James died in 1886 at the age of 62. The headstone for James is difficult to locate except for the Confederate flag on his grave. Beside him lie Louisa (her headstone reads Mother) and their two children, both of whom lived into their seventies and died unmarried.

Similarities

Both brothers were born in England, immigrated to America and New York State, fought in the Civil War for principles they wanted to preserve, returned to Walworth to live near family and friends, and are now at peace resting in Walworth cemeteries. It is not clear whether Jabez and James were aware throughout the war that the other was his sworn enemy. There is no evidence to suggest they ever met in battle.

Editor's Notes:

We are to be able to help James, Julie and Henry research their roots. This is the purpose of our Walworth Historical Society and its mission - to preserve the past for the present and future.

Information for this story was obtained from files at the Walworth Historical Society's museum:

- *"When the Blythes Came Marching Home" by Cheryl Miller, The Times, July 26, 1993.*
- *"It Was Brother Against Brother" by Arch Merrill (no date)*
- *"Southerners Who Rest in the North" by Arch Merrill, Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, May 29, 1955.*