

CASS COUNTY CLIPPINGS

Oct 1, 2014

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Civil War Veteran George Matthews

This last Memorial Day, Kelly Boldan, editor of the *West Central Tribune* in Willmar, wrote a fascinating account of his Civil War ancestor who settled in Poplar Township in Cass County. We have drawn some excerpts about this gentleman from his article published in the *Bemidji Pioneer*, May 25, 2014.

George F. Matthews was born in 1832 in Wellington County, Canada,. Matthews immigrated to Black Hawk County, Iowa. Matthews' mother had earlier bought out her husband's military commission in the British Army so that they could marry and emigrate from England to Canada. While his parents had sought a way out of military service, Matthews answered the call to arms to defend his new country in the Civil War. Although he was not yet a U. S. citizen, he chose to enlist in 1862. Matthews was married, a father, age 30, in the 32nd Iowa Volunteer Infantry Regiment.

In early 1864, Private Matthews was assigned to the Red River Campaign. By April 8, the Union Army had advanced up the Red River about 150 miles. There the Confederates took up a defensive position to repulse the Union advance and the Battle of Mansfield began late that afternoon.



Post Card dated Oct 29, 1911, mailed at Sheboygan, Wis. to Master Ambrose Bottineau of Mae, Minnesota. Cass County Post Card collection.

After losing the battle, Union General Nathaniel Banks withdrew his forces during the night about 13 miles to Pleasant Hill. There the 32nd and 35th Iowa were placed in frontal positions when the Battle of Pleasant Hill began about 4 p.m. on April 9 as Confederate forces attacked the Union units' positions. This battle in northwest Louisiana was the largest battle west of the Mississippi River during the Civil War. (Cont. on page 3)

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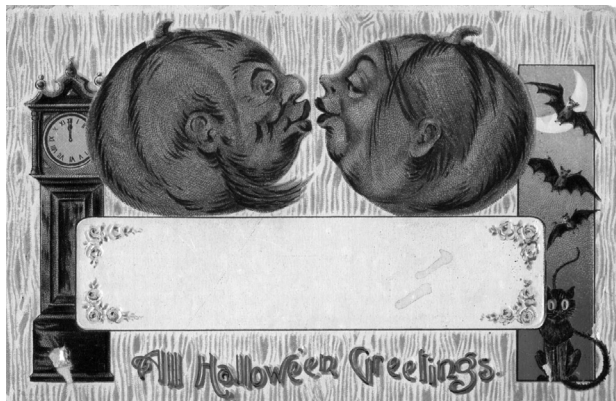
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Free Fridays 2014

The County Museum thanks the sponsors of Free Fridays during 2014. We had 575 visitors who took advantage of the Free Fridays to visit the museum and pioneer school. Our sponsors were: May Creek Senior Living Center, Tim Gilsrud, Walker VFW, The Ranch House, Frizzell Furniture Gallery, Walker American Legion, First National Bank of Walker, Bank Forward, Lampert's Cabinets, Walker Rotary Club, Anderson's Family Resorts, Arvig Enterprises, Inc., Next Innovations, Walker Motor Sports.

When you do your shopping, please thank them for your free admission.



Postcard Dated Oct 30, 1911, addressed to Augusta Rau of Walker. Cass County Postcard Collection.



A valuable addition to our collection was donated in 1958 by Jack Hayward of Remer. The item is known as a "Bolt Die." It was found on the shore of Lake Michaud in Smoky Hollow Township by Hayward on the location of an old blacksmith shop operated by the Weyerhaeuser Lumber Camp in the 1880s. He took the item to their Little Falls office and was told the name and use. The camp blacksmith used the bolt die often for repairing sleds and other equipment in camp. They used a cold steel rod which protruded through one of the beveled holes in the die and was then heated and pounded to form a bolt head. The Weyerhaeuser company told Jack that it was used in that camp some time between 1880 and 1890.

Thanks to Jack Hayward, the bolt has been a part of our blacksmith display at the museum. Hayward moved to Cass County in 1933 and lived in Thunder Lake township many years. During World War II, he was employed in construction work in Alaska and Africa. He constructed several resorts in the Remer area. He was a former assessor for Thunder Lake Township. He moved into Remer in 1971 and died in 1984.

(George Matthews, continued from page 1)

The 32nd Iowa's position was attacked first by a Confederate cavalry and then by infantry multiple times, according to author Scott John's 1896 book "Story of the Thirty-Second Iowa Infantry Volunteers." The 32nd Iowa, including Matthews, soon found themselves alone and flanked on three sides but were able to stop the Confederate advance. The 32nd Iowa lost more than 210 men to these attacks. Private Matthews, now 32, had survived. The 32nd Iowa then retreated and formed up a junction with the 35th Iowa and another regiment as the battle continued into the evening.

The Union lines repelled attacks throughout the evening, winning the battle with the 32nd and 35th Iowa regiments playing major roles. Despite winning the field at Pleasant Hill, General Banks began a general retreat overnight toward Natchitoches and then down the Red River.

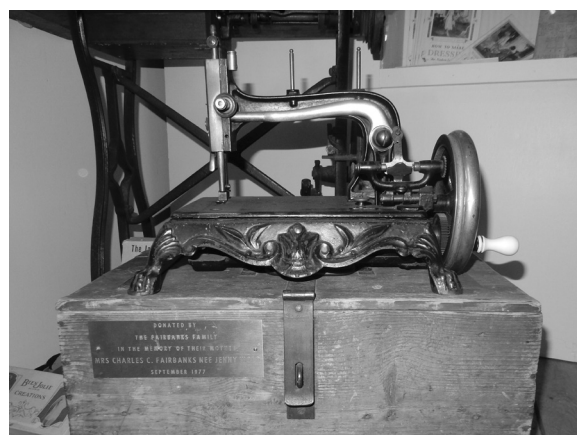
Private Matthews survived the Battle of Pleasant Hill and future battles with the 32nd Iowa in Tennessee,



Mississippi and Alabama. After returning to Iowa and mustering out in August 1865, Matthews returned to his family in Black Hawk County. He would later father three more children, move near Frederika in Bremer County, Iowa, and then in 1894, move to Poplar Township in Cass County. He is buried there in Poplar Cemetery.

Matthews' descendants include many of the Matthews and Johnson descendants of Poplar and Leader in southern Cass County and other Matthews relatives across Minnesota, the U.S., Canada and Australia.

Sewing Machine, Museum Display



This 150 year old sewing machine was donated to the Walker Museum by C. L. Fairbanks, Whipholt. The machine came to the U.S. from Stavanger, Norway in the 1870s by Fairbank's grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Ole Wold. The machine was used to sew clothing for two generations after arriving in the U.S.

Mr. Fairbank's grandfather, Clement C. Fairbanks, was one of the first settlers in Cass County and established and ran a Trading Post on Agency Bay for many years. His father Charles C. Fairbanks was born at the Agency in 1882. In 1945, Charles and Jennie (Wold) Fairbanks retired on 20 acres on Diamond Point and are now interred in the Longville Cemetery.

JOE OSCAR

Joe Oscar was a veteran pilot on Leech Lake at the turn of the century. He was in the area when the Village of Walker was incorporated and spent 14 years from 1896 to 1910 on Leech Lake. Joe was born in Stevens Point, Wisconsin and was married in 1900. The young couple began their married life in the frontier logging town of Walker.

Joe was employed by the Guthrie Construction Company, building contractors for the M & I railroad. Lothrop was the end of the steel and it was a rip-snorting hell-raising railroad town. Old timers claim that size for size, Lothrop did more business than any place they knew of. When the railroad pushed on to Walker, the town moved to Hackensack and today no trace of the bustling town remains.

The company owned a coal burning steamer, the *Jennie Lee*. It was Joe's responsibility to keep the railroad camp located on the Steamboat River in provisions and supplies. While he was pilot of the *Jennie Lee*, the last Indian war between the natives and the U.S. Army was fought on Sugar Point on Leech Lake on October 5, 1898. The *Jennie Lee* was pressed into service to take several newsmen over to the battle site. Joe anchored off Sugar Point and the group listened to the rifle fire of the fight. Evidently one of the Indian fighters figured that the *Jennie Lee* was carrying reinforcements for the soldiers...a bullet aimed with deadly accuracy hit Pilot Joe in the arm and burned a streak across his stomach. He managed to hang on to consciousness until he landed the *Jennie Lee* at the city dock in Walker. There he was hospitalized with the wounded soldiers.

Joe later sued the company for compensation. The rifle ball cut the cords in such a manner as to leave him crippled for the rest of his life. The company refused to settle and eventually the case went before the Ramsey District Court. After two days of trial, the defendant offered to settle for \$700. The plaintiff, Mr. Oscar, accepted and the case was



finally settled in October 1900.

His next job, after the railroad had pushed north, was piloting the steamer, *Vera*, A U.S. Indian Agency boat that towed logs to the agency mill, located on the shores of Leech Lake near what is now known as Old Agency.

Fishing was so good on Leech Lake that anyone could get all the walleyes they wanted almost anyplace on the lake. Lot of fellows made good money fishing for the market then.

Joe, then 88, when he finally returned to Walker said that he wanted to get back here once more before he died.

For more stories about personalities and events of the Battle of Sugar Point, consider purchasing the book about the battle at the Cass County Museum.