

GREAT-GRANDFATHER HENRY JACOB FELL, JR.

Henry J. Fell, Jr. was born in Bavaria, Bayem, Baden, Germany on July 29, 1841. In later years, for documents requiring such information, he would list his birthplace simply as "Byron, Germany."

His parents were Henry J. Fell, Sr., (b. 1811), and Mary Magdalene Flickinger (c. 1812), both from Bavaria, Bayem, Baden, Germany. Henry, Sr. and Mary had seven children between 1841 and 1856. Great-grandfather was the eldest of these. His siblings were Nicholas (1843), Andrew (1846), Mary Magdalene and Eve Magdalena (1847), Phillip (1849), and Catherine (1856). Phillip and Catherine were born in Ohio, the older children were all born in Germany.

When he was six years old (1847), Henry, Jr. came to America with his parents and siblings, settling in Seneca County, Ohio. And from his obit in the local paper, "...here he spent his youthful years in the usual manner of farmers' sons...assisting in the farming operations and securing a common school education. A few years were spent as clerk in a store."

Sometime between 1860 and 1863, Henry's mother died and on October 22, 1863 his father (Henry, Sr.) married Mary Catharine Mitsch in Seneca County, Ohio. Mary Catharine (b. 1833) was also from Bavaria. This union was to be even more fruitful than great-great-grandfather's first marriage, producing nine children: Christopher and Christena (1866), Elizabeth (1868), Eli (1869), Daniel (1870), William (1871), Frederick (1872), Mary (1873) and **another** Henry in 1879 (is it possible they forgot he already had a son named "Henry" from his first marriage, viz. our great-grandfather?).

Henry, Sr. died in Seneca County, Ohio sometime after 1880, followed by his second wife (Mary Catharine) about 1892, also in Ohio.

The Civil War was raging and two weeks after his 21st birthday, on August 12, 1862, Henry, Jr. traveled from his home in Fostoria, Ohio, to Norwalk, Seneca County, Ohio to enlist in the Union Army, having been recruited by Captain R. Robbins. Two months later, on October 11th, at Columbus, Ohio, he was officially sworn in before Captain Dill Meredith, given a physical exam, issued rations and equipment and assigned, as a private, to Captain Hartwell Osborn's Company B, 55th Regiment of Ohio Infantry Volunteers. Great-grandfather's term of enlistment was three years and, at this time, he was 5' 8-1/2" tall, dark complected, with grey (hazel) eyes and thick black hair.

Apparently young Henry did not distinguish himself in the field other than to survive, which was quite a feat in itself considering the art of warfare and soldiering at the time. And whatever is known of his precise whereabouts or battles in which he participated during his tour of duty with the 55th Infantry is covered by my cousin Jack's and Aunt Florence's transcription of Henry's Civil War diaries (see my "Family History" files). However, we do know that, in time, the 55th came under the command of Captain A. S. Benvent and, for a brief time, Henry was assigned to Company I, 136th Regiment of the New York Infantry.

And we know Private Fell's army service was not without its discomforts. In December of 1863, near Stafford Court House, Virginia, he contracted typhoid fever that affected his spine. Six month later (July, 1864), near Peach Tree Creek in Georgia, he suffered sunstroke that, according to medical records, "...affected his head." And, the same month, near Marietta, Georgia, he contracted chronic diarrhea.

In all, Henry failed to make Company muster, due to sickness, a total of 16 times between January 1863, and June 1865. And, during this period, he was hospitalized at U.S.A. General Hospitals in Cleveland, Ohio and Nashville, Tennessee, and Mount Pleasant General Hospital in Washington, D.C. It should be noted that disease cost both Union and Confederate armies more men than wounds suffered in battle. And the ill health Henry Fell experienced in the service of his country would reoccur later in his life and become the focal point of disagreements between him and the government.

By reason of general order number 94, issued by the War Department on May 15, 1865, and special telegraphed instructions dated May 20, 1865, Henry J. Fell, Jr. was honorably discharged from the service of the United States on June 9, 1865, near Washington, D.C.

At the time of his discharge, Private Fell had not been paid for almost two years...since August 31, 1863. We don't know what his pay was or what total he received when mustered out, but records indicate that, on the day of his discharge, Henry was paid \$100 plus a \$44.59 clothing allowance due him. So, on June 9, 1865, with at least \$145.00 in his jeans, Henry J. Fell, Jr. left the army and returned to his farm in Ohio, by way of Louisville, Kentucky.

A little over a month and a half later, on July 27, 1865, Henry married Elizabeth T. Maurer--two days prior to his 24th birthday—in Arcadia, Hancock County, Ohio. Shortly thereafter, in 1866, Henry and his bride left Seneca County, Ohio, for their new home in Ithaca, Gratiot County, Michigan, and to the business of farming.

Elizabeth T. Maurer was born in 1847, in Ohio, and died April 7, 1892 in Gratiot County, Michigan. She was the daughter of Albert John Maurer and Louisa Sage. And like his parents before him, Henry and Elizabeth were a prolific couple, having ten children between 1866 and 1887...

April 29, 1866:	William Sherman Fell
January 1, 1868:	Albert H. Fell (died January 5, 1869)
October 20, 1869:	Mary Ellen Fell
February 21, 1873:	Emily Jane Fell
June 9, 1874:	Egbert Erven Fell (my grandfather)
July 9, 1877:	Leroy Jacob Fell (died March 12, 1879)
April 16, 1880:	Infant son/unnamed (died at birth)
June 29, 1882:	Alston Arthur Fell
May 4, 1884:	Ruby M. Fell
June 17, 1887:	Howard Raymond Fell

Sometime in the early 1880s, Henry began to have physical problems. They were of such a nature that he related them to the various illnesses experienced while in the Army. On August 27, 1885, Henry presented himself to the Circuit Court clerk of Newark Township, Gratiot County, Michigan, for the purpose of declaring for an invalid pension.

He described himself as, "...partly disabled from obtaining subsistence by manual labor by reason of injuries...received in the service of the United States." In making his case, Henry cited typhoid fever, sunstroke and chronic diarrhea as reasons he should be eligible for a service-connected disability pension.

Apparently the government did not readily accept his service-related disorders as sufficient cause(s) for pension, and a minor flurry of claims and counterclaims ensued. On June 23, 1886, one Thomas Ward of the Adjutant General's office, War Department, advised the Commissioner of Pensions that, while Private Fell's absences due to illness were noted in the Company Muster Rolls, none of the available medical records furnished, "...showed any evidence of alleged disabilities."

Note: Subsequent correspondence showed that many army hospital records were simply not available; they no longer existed due to being lost, misplaced or destroyed.

Great-grandfather was not to be put off. In June of 1889, Henry convinced a few close friends to submit affidavits to the effect that, since 1866, they had heard him complain of "disease of the spine," "bloody piles," and other infirmities...that these afflictions were really debilitating and that Henry always said they were related to his Army days. Good friends and nearby neighbors Jeremiah McPherson and Abial S. Loomis so testified. Henry even got one of his old Army buddies, Solomon Sheller (whom he hadn't seen since leaving Ohio for Michigan 23 years earlier), to send in an affidavit.

Apparently all the effort paid off. The disability pension was finally allowed. It's also apparent that the government was going to have its pound of flesh, too, in the form of compulsory physical exams for former Private Fell. Henry submitted to these exams periodically on...

December 30, 1885

April 11, 1888

July 15, 1891

December 20, 1893

March 21, 1900

April 22, 1903

Henry had won his bureaucratic skirmish with the Army, but he was truly suffering discomfort, and he and his wife had precious little time to enjoy their minor victory together. On April 7, 1892, Elizabeth T. Maurer Fell, age 45, died in Ithaca, Newark Township, Gratiot County, Michigan. At age 51, Henry was a widower with seven children ranging in age from 5 to 26 (although we can expect William, Mary Ellen and, possibly, Emily had left home by this time).

Phebe Elizabeth Meracle was born in September 23, 1849, in Potter County, Pennsylvania. Her father was John Meracle and she never knew her mother, not even her name. On Christmas Day, 1867, when she was 18, Phebe married John Proctor in Ashtabula County, Ohio. Proctor did not serve in the Civil War and he and Phebe eventually came to live in Tuscola County, Michigan. John Proctor died there on October 26, 1873. Shortly thereafter, Phebe met Amos Shaw and they were married in Vassar, Michigan on July 25, 1875. Shaw died in Vassar on July 20, 1890. Phebe was twice widowed at age 40 with two children from her marriage to Amos Shaw.

On October 31, 1893, Henry J. Fell, Jr., widower, age 52, and Phebe E. Meracle Proctor Shaw, widow, age 44, appeared before the Gratiot County clerk to take out a marriage license. They were married the next day (November 1st) by Rev. W.H. Betteys, Jr., a Baptist minister. Orin Bradley and John Bratt, both of Vassar, Michigan, witnessed the marriage. There would be no children by this marriage.

Henry continued to farm in spite of increasing physical discomfort, and he continued to draw his quarterly pension from the government. He and Phebe lived at Rural Route #2, Box 90, Ithaca, Michigan.

Back in the nation's capital, the Bureau of Pensions was now under the Department of The Interior and, apparently, on/about May 11, 1912, Congress took some action that affected the rights of Civil War veterans...most likely increasing their benefits. Whatever took place, it wasn't happening fast enough for great-grandfather. On January 27, 1913, he took pen in hand and, on a small piece of lined paper, wrote...

“Ithaca Mich Jan 27 1913

Commissioner of Pension Washington D.C.

Dear Sir. I would be glad to know why the delay in my pension case under Acts of Congress of May 11th 1912. I Henry J. Fell of Co. B. 55 O.V. Inf. did make application May 24 1912 which was filed in pensions office May 27 – 1912. My pension certificate no. 360566. I inducted August 12th 1862. Was discharged June 9th 1865.

Yours truly

Henry J. Fell

R.R. #2, Box 90”

It’s interesting to note that Henry’s letter arrived in Washington on January 30th, three days after he posted it in Ithaca, Michigan. That’s faster mail service than we get today!

Eventually he got things straightened out with the Pension Bureau, but he was still filling out forms for them on March 9, 1915 and again on April 19, 1926. By this time, Phebe was 76 and Henry 84. He complained of rheumatism and partial blindness and referred to himself as, “...having been a farmer.” Phebe was more specific. In a note to the Pension Bureau, also dated April 19, 1926 (and probably not seen by Henry, unless he put her up to it), she advised that her husband was unable to dress or undress himself...his left leg was kept bandaged all the time because of swelling, blood clots in the veins and poor circulation...that he could not get up without assistance if he fell, and that his eyesight was such that he was unable to recognize anyone over a few feet away.

It must have been difficult for him during the next six years. During the period from November 1, 1930 until January 23, 1932, he was attended by Dr. B.C. Hall from nearby Pompeii. Then, shortly after midnight on January 24, 1932, Phebe summoned Dr. Hall to the house.

Henry died at 4:00 a.m. having committed 90 years, 6 months and 26 days to his life on earth. The official cause of death was listed as “chronic myocarditis.” C.M. Dodge, an undertaker from Middleton, Michigan, handled arrangements and on January 26, 1932, Henry Jacob Fell, Jr. was laid to rest in Fritz Cemetery in Gratiot County, Michigan.

Phebe’s last official act with the government occurred on February 5, 1932 when she filed for her widow’s pension. Section N. Pension Files Sub-Division, Office of the Chief, received her declaration at 12:30 p.m. a week later, on Lincoln’s birthday.

Robert T. Fell, Sr.
September 6, 1977
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

Updated August 23, 2010
Okemos, Michigan