

O'Neill Cemetary tells sad tale

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Such a sad story for this week's soldier, one with a different twist, too! Kim Hancock didn't order his stone, she found it. She discovered it while in the O'Neill cemetery at Yountsville. The stone was perfectly buried an inch under the ground. An unbroken, beautiful 18 x 45 memorial to a brave young man who fought in Company E, in the 72nd Indiana, better known as Wilder's Brigade.

The 72nd lost 160 men, 30 killed and wounded plus 130 by disease. James O. Mount who would become Indiana's 24th Governor was a sergeant of the 72nd in Co. D. It is assumed Silas Albertson died from disease (but possibly from wounds in one of the final battles of the war). His death occurred fourteen days after the signing of the surrender papers at Appamatox, but where it occurred is not certain. Of course, we know where he is buried and since few bodies were returned, he likely was sick and came home to die. Not long before his death (thanks Scott B) he was transferred to the invalid corps so wounds or sickness for sure.

Some of the battles the Wilder's Brigade were involved in included Chickamauga, Resaca, Kennesaw Mountain and the Atlanta campaign, some of the biggest. They were active from August 1862 to June 1865 and was a mounted group from March '63 to November '64.

Albertson was one of at least 15 Montgomery County men from his company to lose their life, including one of the company's musicians, John Webster and his friend, William Ashby, both from Ladoga. Much of the company was from Montgomery County but others were from Tippecanoe, Fountain, other Indiana counties with several from Illinois.

Silas W. Albertson was the son of William White and Rhoda Maria Thurston Albertson. They had seven children, but lost five within their lifetimes. They were married in Montgomery County, three days after Valentines Day in 1842 and had their first son William Henry on Valentines Day the following year. He passed away three days before Christmas in 1850. They lost two other sons before they died, Abraham when young and Lew a young man. Their only daughter, Mattie died at age two years, Silas likely reveling in having a little sister and devastated at her death. She, the boys and Silas are all buried in the old Masonic (Oak Hill Grant Avenue) cemetery.

After the Civil War and death of so many children, the couple took the remaining two, Thomas and Wallace moving to Big Bend, Kansas where they farmed and William passed away April 8, 1888. By 1900, Rhoda and the boys lived in Payne County, Oklahoma; Thomas, a Methodist minister married with the only two grandchildren of the Albertsons, as his brother (Wallace) never wed.

After Kim found the Albertson stone, she spent a couple of days cleaning and refreshing it. The marker has an eagle and a poem:

For years his was the soldier's life
 In Camps and tented fields
 And nature was forced to yield.
 He died not on the battlefield
 Yet his death was not less brave
 He freely gave his life away
 His native land to save.

So perfect, don't you think? The cemetery was cleaned by several members of the local genealogy society and when the stone was set back upright just in time for Memorial Day in 2007, Kim said she had goose bumps and stood in awe as the small flag was put by his stone. "It sure brings back memories of why I so love to restore the markers!"

Another 72nd soldier buried in O'Neill was John A. Neely, son of Thomas and Elizabeth, likely born in Montgomery County, certainly Indiana, maybe Sullivan County where his father lived previous to coming to Montgomery. John had several brothers and sisters, William, Mary, Christian and his father was an Irish immigrant, who farmed outside of Crawfordsville. He was born May 2nd, 1843. John was in the same company as Silas Albertson mustering in at Ladoga July 25th in 1862 and died March 28th, 1863 likely from wounds of the Battle of Stones River a couple of months before or possibly from a skirmish.

Thanks Kim for not only making sure (John Neely's too) Silas Albertson's stone is again marking his place of honor but for all the work you do to Etch in Stone so many of our local soldiers!

Karen Zach is the editor of Montgomery Memories, our monthly magazine all about Montgomery County. Her column, Around the County, appears each Thursday in The Paper of Montgomery County.

