



Brown County Journal

February 15, 2016

Events:

Brown County Historical
Society Dinner Meeting
March 7

Brown County
Genealogical Society
Meeting
March 10

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Rhonda A. Dunn

The Civil War Journal of John M. Laurie

John M. Laurie was an ordinary citizen that was put in extraordinary circumstances. He was born about 1839 in Pennsylvania. As with many of our immigrants from Ohio he arrived here in Brown County after the Civil War. John served in the Ohio Volunteers - Sept. 28, 1861 to Oct. 12, 1864 Company F 34th Regiment of the Ohio Volunteers Infantry - Chapmanville, West Virginia. From his obituary it says that he served three years in the Civil War, marched with Sherman from Atlanta to the sea, and for a number of months endured horrors as a prisoner of war at Libby and Belle Isle. He was discharged at Columbus, Ohio.

After his service, he moved to Booneville, Missouri. John had a land-grant application for 40 acres in Booneville, Missouri dated 8 July 1885. Signed by Rutherford B. Hayes, President; William H. Crook, Secretary. He moved his family to Indiana about 1875 and resided at R.R. 1, Mt. Liberty, Indiana near the Brown and Bartholomew county line.

John Laurie married Elizabeth Little in Missouri in 1867 and they had six children: Grant, Maud, Frank, Clyde, Mary, Albert "Bert", and Annie. Some of you may remember Albert Laurie who was the animal caretaker at the Brown County State Park. He was the recipient of the following document written by his father. Known as "Bert" Laurie, he farmed and lived on Spearsville Road outside of Beanblossom for many years until his death in 1962.

The following document was given to his son, Paul, and after his death, since there are no children, his wife, Juanita M. (Pat) Laurie was in possession of the original document detailing a fascinating historical report about the Civil War and the engagements that John Laurie encountered. Since her father-in-law, Bert Laurie, was

well-known in Brown County, she wanted to make a gift of this document to the Brown County Historical Society. Please note, the memoranda is copied verbatim (misspellings, etc.) as taken from the original hand-written copy. This is a transcription of his journal kept while on the march by John M. Laurie.

JOURNAL - MEMORANDA NO. 1

Camp Piatt, May 1, 1864

We left Camp Toland this morning about ten o'clock and arrived here about eight o'clock. Altho the distance between here and Charleston is but ten miles. Yet we, that is Duffies Brigade, had to be ferried over the river. A tedious operation lasting over four hours. Whiskey seems to be very plenty and not a few of the boys are mighty inebriated. We are in the first Brigade composed of the 2nd & 3rd Virginia Cavalry and 34th O.V., General Duffie commanding.

Peytona, May 2nd

Arrived here in good time. Had supper cooked before dark. I was one of a detail to remain at Piatt and get cartridges. The Q.M. wouldn't let us have them. We got soaking wet while waiting for them. Then started to rejoin our Regt., and didn't catch up untill well within two miles of this place. The Column didn't leave Piatt untill late in the day and they rode fast to make up lost time. Rained last night, all day today and drizzling rain now. Very comfortable, it is.

Near Chapmanville, May 3rd

Today we passed along the old route and are now near the scene of the first engagement our Regt. had with the Rebles Sept. 26th 1861. I hope we may be as successful on this expedition.

Logan Court House, May 4th

Our Brigade camped on an island in the Wyandotte River. This evening some of the boys found a dead Rebel Lieut. Half burried in the sand near the Ford. The citizens say that he was shot by our men while escaping across the river sometime last March. He had on a blue overcoat. One fellow took his revolver, another took his commission and about fifty dollar Reble script. Another robber of the dead, meaner than the others, took a ring off the dead man's finger. I don't mind the taking of the revolver, but I say God Damn the man that searches the dead. He is worse than the dogs and wolves that eat



John M. Laurie

them. We haven't got a "hard tack" among us and will have to draw rations and forage before we leave.

Near Wyoming Court House, May 5th

Left Logan about noon after drawing rations and forage. We have had a very fatiguing march over mountains arriving here about 11 o'clock tonight.

Foot of Indian Ridge, May 6th

The 5th and 7th Va. Cavalry left us at Wyoming C.H. to join the infantry under Genl. Crook. We are camped on Tug River. Some say this is Indian Ridge and others say the Backbone Mountains. We have been climbing mountains all day. Very hard on both men and horses. Arrived here about nine o'clock this evening.

Abbs Valley, May 7th

Arrived here this afternoon. Surprised and captured the pickets without any alarm and succeeded in capturing a company of forty-five men and officers belonging to the 8th Reble Cavalry. This is the same place where we captured a company of Infantry when going to Wytheville with Toland. The roads that we came over today had been blockaded last July to keep us from retreating on them. The blockade had not been cut out yet. We went around them. It seems that we are again bound for Whytheville.

Near Jeffersonville, May 8th

We were in line of battle at daylight this morning expecting the Rebs to attack us. They were reported to be fifteen hundred strong and about five miles from us. While we were in line our old Chaplain preached a short sermon and had prayers. We left camp about six o'clock and about ten o'clock my Regt. was dismounted and we began with the enemy. We drove them about three miles keeping up a desultory fire. We could do but little as we were skirmishing with Cavalry. And they would retreat after emptying their carbines and revolvers. Some wouldn't take time to do even that. A squadron of the 2nd Va. Cav. charged them at last and scattered them. My Regt. had one killed and two wounded. I hear that the first Va. Cav. had two killed while on reconnaissance towards Jeffersonville, the county seat of Fayewell County. We camped within three miles of the place.

Rocky Gap, May 9th

We left the vicinity of Jeffersonville last night about eleven o'clock. Rode all night and today on the Princeton Road. When about eight miles from the Cross Roads we captured a Reble train of five or six wagons, an Army Forge and traps. An old Darky showed our boys a cave where there was about two thousand dollars worth of Q.M. stores. We destroyed both train and stores. After getting to the Cross Roads, we took the road to the right and crossed East River Mountain. Cross Roads is the place where our Co. wagon was captured by the Rebs in May 1862. All of our knapsacks and Co. property was

lost. We had some consolation by capturing the Staff wagons of the 51st Va. Reble Inf. Col. Pendleton lost all that he had in the way of traps. We are now camped on the Wytheville Road 30 miles from that place. The citizens say that Genl Crook's Division of Infantry passed here yesterday evening and is now on the March for Dublin Station 20 miles from Wytheville on the railroad. I hear that a Lieut. and fifteen men belonging to the 14th Penn. Cav. were captured while on picket last night. Also, that the enemy was in force at Jeffersonville where we left. Now it appears that the fastest wins the prize as it is as near to Wytheville this way as by way of Jeffersonville. Neither Averill or Duffie make as rapid movements as Jack Toland made.

On Guard at Ferry Over New River, May 11th

Well, we have got a thrashing. Thank the God of Battles that so many got away with their "Nappers" myself included in the lucky number. Now for a detail of what happened yesterday. Left Rocky Gap early yesterday morning. The first squadron of the 34th Reg. O.V.M. composed of Co's E, F, and I having the advance for the first part of the day. In the afternoon we were relieved by a squadron of the 3rd Va. Cav. And our squadron was ordered to support them. We drove in the pickets at Wytheville about three o'clock in the afternoon we followed them on the charge until we run into a complete trap. The road was blockaded where it ran through a gap between two steep hills or mountains, the ridges forming an acute angle with the road. The tops or crests of the ridges were filled with the enemy and as we galloped round a sharp turn in the road. The Rebs pitched into us with a will. The foremost ranks of horses and men down at the first fire and those immediately behind falling on them completely blocked up the road. Added to this two pieces of artillery began sending in their compliments in shape of grape and cannister. Thank god they were very poor gunners.

MEMORANDUM NO. 2

Such another mass of struggling men and horses I never seen before. We dismounted as soon as possible and sent our horses to the rear. Then we took to the fence corners, stumps, and trees to hold our position until the Column came up. The Column was a good ways behind and it was nearly twenty minutes before it came up to our support. Fifteen minutes later and the



Bert Laurie (middle) at the State Park animal pens with some soldiers

whole advance guard would have been captured as they were closing in on our rear and were firing at our horses. We were under a hot fire until the column came up. Just at this time our boys nearest the Gap observed the Reinforcements to the Enemy swarming along the ridges on both sides of the road and extending their line. Then began the maneuvers for regular fighting.

My Regt. was deployed as skirmishers. Part on one side and part on the other side of the road and ordered to move forward up the hills. Our boys on the left of the road moved up the hill until near the top. A straight up and down cliff of rock nearly twenty feet high and Rebels on the top of it stopped our farther progress in that direction. Some sharp skirmishing was kept up for a while but subsided into the desultory fire of sharpshooting. We watched our boys on the right going up the hill. Slowly step by step they drove the Rebels from off the hillside. When they got near the top we knew that they would have fight against the Rebel reinforcements. At last the crash came and our boys gave ground at this time the Rebel artillery began to shell them. Our boys retreated to the foot of the hill, the Rebels following them closely. The Rebel Artillery had good range of our boys for their shell burst over the boys' heads every shot. The 2nd Brigade was dismounted. The recall was blown and the 34th Regt mounted their horses and the 2nd Brigade was deployed as skirmishers. The right and center gave way and were slowly falling back. The skirmishers were close onto us when our Regt. was ordered to form a line on a hill in a wheat field about 200 yards in the rear. We galloped across to the place and wheeled into line as coolly and precise as if on parade, and on parade we were, for not less than five thousand of the enemy were in the fields before us. Their Reserve watching while their skirmishers were firing on us.

The 2nd Brigade was outflanked and retreated in some confusion. We dismounted and formed our line. The 2nd Brigade coming in behind us and getting into something like order. Our horses were sent

to the rear. Gen. Averill rode up and ordered us to return the Enemy's fire and to fire by Rank. After the first volley he ordered us to deploy as skirmishers. Then commenced hard fighting. The Cavalry were deployed on our flanks, but the Rebels completely outflanked us. Their main attack was on our flanks driving them back thus compelling the center to fall back to keep the Rebels from breaking our line, getting in our rear and capturing our horses. We seen



Bert Laurie with his hogs

that we could only hope for night to escape capture. For over two hours we fought, our lines hardly 200 yards apart. At length, night put an end to the bloody contest and right glad were we to lay down and rest until our horses were brought up. Nearly one third of our men hadn't a single cartridge. A Division of cartridges was made about nine o'clock so as to give as many men as possible ten rounds apiece.

We were deployed in the woods on each side of the fields. The Cavalry were deployed in the fields and were to keep the Enemy off until the Division was ready to leave. But the Rebs were satisfied with what they had got and didn't seem anxious to fight in the dark. Altho they were not more than 500 yards from us, I felt very weary and sleepy, but there was not much sleeping done that night. The Davis had to shake me to keep me awake. I seen one of Col. Lying dead on the field, shot through the head. John Smith was as brave a soldier as ever shouldered a gun. Another one, Frank Hale went away wounded in the side. At last we got the order to mount and we took the road to Dublin. Genl Averill was wounded in the head while giving orders to our Regt. We heard from the pickets we captured that Genl Crook had been victorious at Cloyd Mountain and had drove the Rebs as far as the New River Bridge.

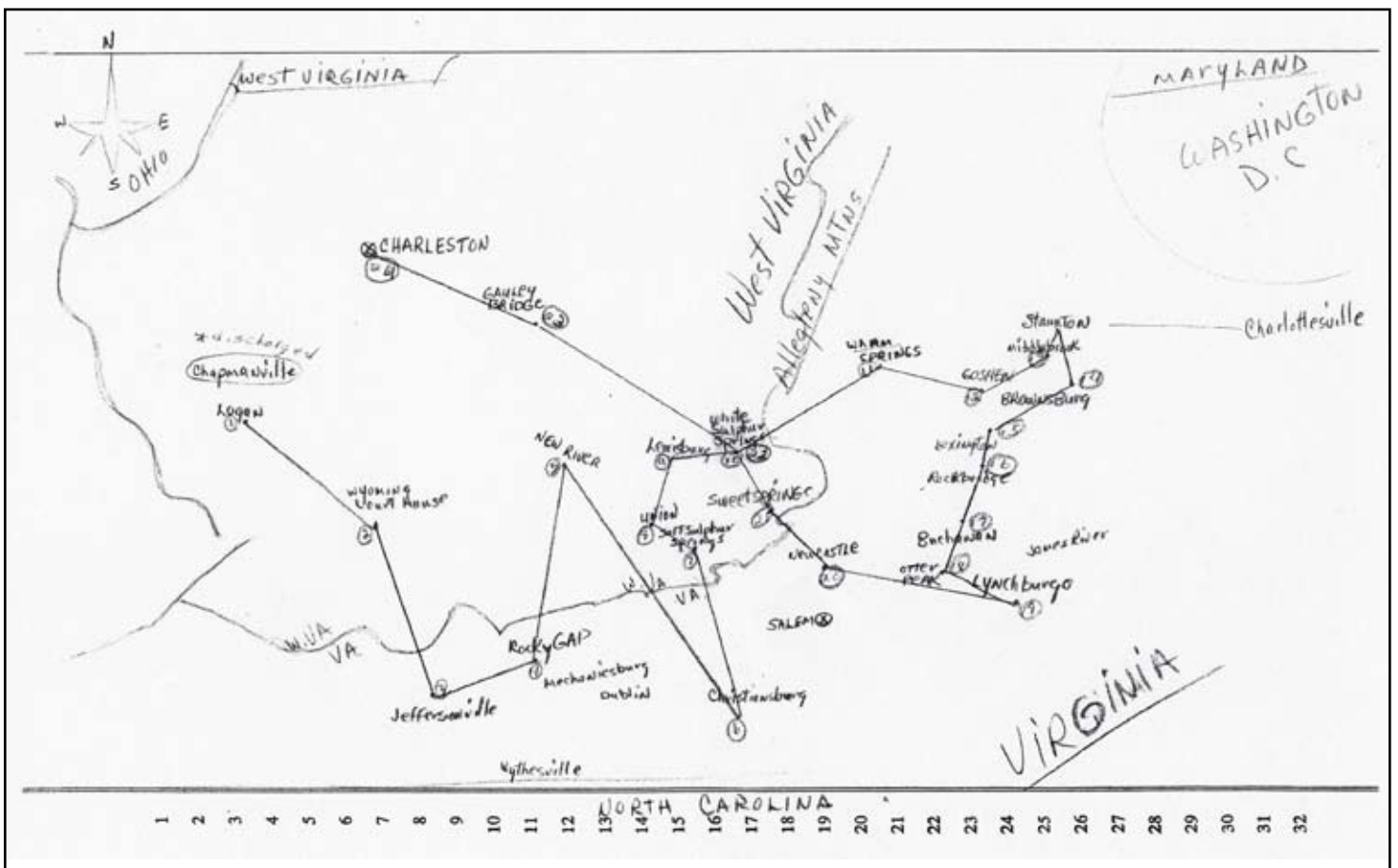
It was about nine o'clock when we began our march to Dublin. Rode all night. Passed through Mechanicsburg. Eat breakfast at the foot of a mountain near that place and left some of our wounded that couldn't ride any farther. Came to New River about noon. My Co. was advance guard. We crossed Cloyd Mountain and seen part of the battleground where Crook whiped the Rebs under Jenkins. Their breastworks were formidable looking works and from appearance there had been hard fighting. All the dead were not buried yet. The battle was fought day before yesterday. I seen one man that was torn to pieces by a shell, his legs and arms were spliced or tied in their places. I seen a Rebel Major and one of our boys lying close to the road. There had been a good many buried, but away off to the left in a field there was a good number still unburied. We heard that the Rebs had come back into Dublin after Crook left and we expected a mess, but we didn't meet anyone but a Reb surgeon and we hawked him in. The Burg looked as natural as ever, not a bit changed since I went thru it a prisoner nearly two years ago. After getting into Dublin, Genl Averill sent our squadron seven miles out to the ferry over New River four miles below the bridge. We are the same as picket guard. We expect to cross the river tomorrow. I hear that Crook left here at noon. The boys are very near fagged out, riding and fighting yesterday, riding all last night and today thro the rain, tonight on guard and of course we will have to ride all day tomorrow, but we can snooze in the saddle when the roads is good.

Christiansburg, May 12th

Camped at this place for the night. Had a very hard time crossing New River. Two men and five or six horses drowned. The river was high and rising rapidly. The floating timbers of the railroad bridge increased the danger. Christiansburg is a very pretty town. We tried to capture some Reble Cavalry in the town, but they smelt a mouse and emigrated leaving three pieces of artillery caissons and

amunition. But we couldn't get harness, so they were destroyed. I hear that Crook is at Blacksburg ten miles from here. I hope we may soon come up with him as we are out of rations and have been for some days. Got some tobacco at this place. Most of the boys were out of tobacco and they laid in a good supply. We don't like it as well as we do our own, but the tobacco chewers must have some no matter what kind.

(John M. Laurie's journals go on for many more pages. If anyone would like to read the rest of his journal entries please stop by the Archives. We could not fit it all in this newsletter. The journal entries will continue next newsletter.)



John M. Laurie's march according to his journal entries.