

# The Newcomer

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## *Plaque Placed at the Gravesite of the Last County Civil War Soldier: John Sarver*

*The commemoration ceremony honoring Newton County's last Civil War soldier, John C. Sarver, (1843-1941), Private, Co. E. 99th Indiana Volunteer Infantry, was held at the Prairie Vine Cemetery in Washington Township on June 11, 2011. Kyle Conrad presented a history of Mr. Sarver's life, followed by the ceremony presented by the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, Ft. Benjamin Harrison, Indianapolis.*

"John "Cal" Sarver was born in Indianapolis on February 22, 1843. As a young boy he came to what is now Newton County and was raised in the home of John and Mary Padgett in Washington Township. In August of 1862 at the age of 19, John heeded the call of his President, Abraham Lincoln, and enlisted in the Union Army, Company E of the 99th Indiana Volunteer Infantry.

"Over the course of the next nearly three years, Sarver saw some of the most fierce fighting of the Civil War. The 99th was involved in battles of Vicksburg, Missionary Ridge, and Atlanta, where Sarver was wounded, and the 99th also participated in the famous march to the sea under Major General William Tecumseh Sherman. Sarver served til the end of the war, having been mustered out at Indianapolis on June 5, 1865.

"John Sarver then returned home to Newton County, no longer a teenage boy, but a man with the scars, both physically and emotionally, to prove it. Sarver engaged in farming and on June 16th, 1867 he married Miss Cynthia Williams, also of Newton County. To this union five children were born; Mary, John, Cora, Charley, and George.

"As a member of the Morocco Grand Army of the Republic post, Sarver was a fixture at Memorial Day events and funerals of his departed comrades, serving alongside veterans of later wars and doing so until the infirmities of old age no longer allowed him to.

"On November 23, 1941 at his winter home in Pensacola, Florida, John Sarver suffered a heart attack and died. The final chapter of one of the greatest eras in American and Newton County history had been written. John Sarver was buried here, in Prairie Vine Cemetery on November 26th, 1941. Full military rites were accorded him by soldiers

of the Spanish and World War, as well as a firing squad from Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indianapolis. The local Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War served as ushers at his funeral, but there was one thing missing. None of his comrades were there to salute him as he had done them dozens, maybe hundreds of times over the course of nearly 80 years. And little did anyone know who was standing here at his grave site the day they laid him to rest, that the beginning of the next 'great generation' of soldiers these United States would see was just 11 days away. Today, we commemorate not his death as Newton County's last Civil War soldier, but the life John Calvin Sarver lived."

Benjamin Harrison Camp Commander Garry Walls proceeded with the commemoration.

"Honored guests, Ladies and Gentlemen. On behalf of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War I wish to thank you for coming today. We are here today to honor and forever mark the resting place of the Last Civil War Soldier of Newton County, John Calvin Sarver. As nothing worthy of merit can be

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Spring-Summer of 1911



*Newton County veterans and citizens gathered at Prairie Vine Cemetery in Washington Township in June, 2011, to honor the life of Newton County's last Civil War veteran, John C. Sarver, Private, Co. E, 99th Indiana Volunteer Infantry, 1843-1941. A plaque was placed on his tombstone for this honor. Photograph by Beth Bassett.*

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accomplished without Divine guidance I ask you to bow your heads as the Chaplain invokes His Divine blessing.

*Chaplain:* "Let us Pray, Supreme Ruler of the universe, God of battle and of peace, we thank thee for this day and hour; for this blessed privilege of meeting here as sons of soldiers to pay homage to a nation's dead.

"We thank thee that in the day of trouble and the hour of danger that thou in thy infinite wisdom raised up men who were ready to do battle, and if need be, to die so that this country might be preserved. Grant us we beseech thee, a continuance of thy watchful care.

"Grant Thy blessing upon these sacred ceremonies consecrated as they are to the memory of brave and loyal hearts who dared stand for the right and were not afraid to bare their breasts to a storm of steel in defense of human liberty, a united country and the brotherhood of man.

Bless our country. Preserve it in purity and integrity. Amen."

*Commander Walls:* "The reason we assemble today is best explained by Past Commander in Chief Perie L. Fouch when he addressed the last Encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic in 1949. He said in part "The records of three hundred fighting regiments show, that of their number, one in three was either killed or wounded.

"They stood at Antietam, they faced the heights of Donnellson and Fredericksburg, and stood among the cedars at Stone's River, met the fearful shock at Shiloh, became granite columns with the rocks of Chickamauga, formed a living wall against treason's mightiest power at Gettysburg, moved unfaltering in the slaughter pens of Cold Harbor, and climbed up to rocky precept and mountainside to the portals of glory on Lookout, Kennesaw, and Mission Ridge.

"Can we comprehend the loss of human life, even that comprehension will be but a dim picture of the reality unless our imagination be vivid enough to fill all its lines and spaces with privation and suffering, unless we can call up the summer's tempest, and winter's sleet, unless we can behold them fording streams and battling alike with the enemy, ice and swift currents; marching day after day through swamps. Standing on the lonely picket post until too wearied to be even wakeful; unless we can behold the gaunt starvation making hollow the cheek and dimming the light of the eye.



Left to right, Kyle Conrad, Mike Beck, Past Camp Commander, Benjamin Harrison Camp, Benjamin Harrison Camp Commander Garry Walls and Tim Beckman, Past Camp Commander, Benjamin Harrison Camp. Beth Bassett photograph.

Unless we can see the long lines of shroudless bodies and hear the pitiful cry for water and the prayer for succor. I believe our imagination will come far short of reality.

"In the shadow of 500,000 graves in the daily presence of those that returned diseased and broken down, with Libby still vocal with the echo of suffering, with the memory of Belle Island, Salisbury, Millen and Andersonville lighted as though with lurid fires of hell, standing under the clouds of grief that darkened half a million homes, we proclaim a roll of honor of the Grand Army of the Republic.

"That roll was made and completed in days of old, it was written with the red blood from human hearts, its letters more bright and more precious than were they written in the purest gold and they were burned on the pages of life. Therefore, we the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, gather at this memorial in sacred memory of our fathers and their sacrifices."

"If I may be so bold as to quote from the epitaph from another time and place 'Tell them of us and say, for their tomorrow we gave our today.

"As all the veterans here gathered are aware, a Soldier cannot leave his post without being properly relieved. Private Sarver, you are now relieved, I have the post. Rest in peace."

"*Salute:* Three volleys by firing squad.

"*Taps*" is sounded.

*Commander Walls:* Chaplain, the benediction please

*Chaplain:* Let us pray, Heavenly father we again ask your blessing on all here and your protection as we depart this hallowed ground. Teach us to be ever mindful of the sacrifices of those that have gone before us and hold in your tender mercies the defenders of this Great Country. AMEN

*Commander:* Our service of dedication is ended. In the name of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War I thank you, for your courtesy in permitting us, who are bound by special ties to them, to honor our dead. Taps are sounded - lights are out - the soldier sleeps."

Mr. Conrad concluded the ceremony by thanking those that attended, as well as Judy Taylor, Washington Township trustee, and her board for funding the bronze plaque now affixed to John's monument, forever recognizing him as Newton County's last Civil War soldier. He also mentioned that it was probable that Mr. Sarver attended many burials of his Civil War comrades, but there would be none to attend his, and, that little did the gathering at his grave know that within only the next few months that Japanese forces would bomb Pearl Harbor, and the beginning of Americans involved in World War II.