

John Belcher & Derinda Baley

And The Civil War

By Frances Harrington

The southern legislatures felt threatened by Abraham Lincoln because he was known to be opposed to slavery. After decades of tension between the North and the South over the issues of states' rights, the opening up of the West to future statehood, and slavery, Abraham Lincoln being elected President of the United States on November 4, 1860, was not at all what they hoped for. Soon after the election, 7 southern states seceded from the Union. Those southern states created what they called the Confederate Constitution, and elected Jefferson Davis as provisional president until elections could be held. Despite of all this, Abraham Lincoln took office on March 4, 1861.

The Civil War began on April 12, 1861, at Fort Sumter. After shots were fired, the fort was surrendered to South Carolina in less than 48 hours. Soon, 4 more states seceded (and eventually the total would be 13). The defeat at Fort Sumter angered and humiliated many in the North. With a regular army of only 16,000 men, it became evident that the Union would need more soldiers, which caused many northerners to enlist. It was commonly thought that the Civil War would only last for 90 days. When it became evident that this was not going to be a "90-day war", many more men enlisted.



On August 9, 1861, a 25-year-old man from Lee, Calhoun County, enlisted in the 6th Michigan Infantry, Company E/Heavy Artillery, at Marshall, Calhoun County, and mustered in at Kalamazoo on August 20, 1861. His name was John Belcher. The 6th Michigan Infantry was supposed to be part of the Army of the Potomac, but ended up with most of their service in the Southwest, the Mississippi River, and the Gulf of Mexico. In April of 1862, they were sent to assist General Butler's forces in the attack on New Orleans, but didn't arrive until after the city had been captured. They were sent on many excursions into the surrounding country and up and down the Mississippi River, capturing and destroying property they thought might be an asset to the Confederate Army, and confiscating confederate supplies. Many of these excursions were very hazardous and they spent months in the swamp lands of Louisiana. By December 6, 1862, only 191 men out of 755 were fit for duty. They nick-named the location the "camp of death". After relocating to New Orleans, they began to recover and regain their health. Next, they were sent to assist in repulsing a heavy attack at Baton Rouge, where the Company suffered many injuries and deaths. Later that month they took part in the capture of the rebel gunboat "Cotton". They made expeditions to Ponchatoula, Amite River, Tickfaw River, and then made a raid against the Jackson Railroad. In May, they received special commendations for gallantry and daring for their part in the siege of Port Hudson in Louisiana, where they lost one-third of their men.

On January 5, 1864, Ransom Baley (commonly spelled Bailey), enlisted with the 9th Michigan Infantry, Company E, at Eckford Township, Calhoun, Michigan. Ransom was the husband of John's older sister, Derinda (Belcher) Baley. They lived in Marshall, Calhoun County, with their 2 daughters, Sarah and Minnie, and son Nelson. Ransom was 44 years old when he enlisted. The war had dragged on for almost three years, and so many men had already been killed or come home disabled. There was hardly a town in the North who hadn't lost some of their brave young men. If the North was to win the war, they needed more troops. President Lincoln made a call for more men to step up. Ransom joined up with the regiment on February 29, 1864, with 200 other Michigan recruits. The 9th Michigan Infantry was part of the Georgia campaign and was in action at Rocky Face Ridge, Resaca, Dallas, Kennesaw, Chattahoochee River, and the siege of Atlanta.

In March 1864, at Port Hudson, John Belcher's tour of duty was considered over, and he could have returned home to Michigan, never to see war again, but that wasn't John. He along with 246 other men in his regiment made the decision to re-enlist. They were allowed a 30-day furlough back to Michigan. After their furlough, they returned to Port Hudson. They went on to Vicksburg, Mississippi, then to White River, and Aston, Arkansas. They were divided into detachments and served as a heavy artillery unit, and took part assisting the Navy in the siege of Mobile Bay, near the Gulf of Mexico. It was during this time that John received an injury from a shell that exploded close to the right side of his head. On August 23, 1864, only four months after he reenlisted, he was honorably discharged because of his injuries. The rest of his regiment continued to fight, and was discharged in September of 1865.



On June 4, 1864, Derinda Baley gave birth to her 4th child, a girl named Nellie. That same year, during the Georgia campaign, Ransom Baley was taken ill and moved to the field hospital at Lookout Mountain, Tennessee. He died there on October 23, 1864, only 9 months after enlisting. He is buried at the Chattanooga Cemetery nearby. Derinda was now a widow, her children fatherless, and baby Nellie would never meet her father.

The Civil War finally came to an end on April 9, 1865. Approximately 620,000 were killed, 467,000 were wounded, and 400,000 were captured/missing. More casualties and deaths were the result of non-combat-related sickness and disease than any other cause. For every 3 men killed in battle, 5 more died from diseases. From Michigan, 90,000+ men and women served - 14,522 died. Eighty-one of those who died were from Muskegon County.

The 1870 U.S. Census has John Belcher, living back in Lee Township, Calhoun County, Michigan. He was doing farm labor and has one son named William, born in 1866. There is no wife listed and I was unable to find a marriage record for him or for the birth of William. It was never stated what kind of injury John received to his head from that exploded shell, but I believe it was possibly a piece of shrapnel that entered his skull. He started having some mental issues and problems with his eyesight. The first record of a pension request I could find was in 1878.

NAME OF BENEFITARY <i>Belcher, John</i>				
NAME OF DEPENDENT Widow, _____ Minor, _____				
RESIDENCE <i>B & Mich. Subs. B. 1 Mich. H. O. L.</i>				
DATE OF FILING <i>10/20/78</i>	CLASS Invalid, _____ Widow, _____ Minor, _____	APPLICATION NO. <i>254753</i>	CERTIFICATE NO. <i>228750</i>	STATE FROM WHICH PAID
ATTORNEY				
PREPARED BY <i>W. C. C.</i>				

He received a pension of \$4 a month. By 1879, Derinda and three of her children had moved to Muskegon and bought a home at the corner of Spring and Webster, with a small cottage in the back, where she let her brother John and his son William live. That same year she applied for and became John's legal guardian because he was deemed incompetent. By 1883, John was totally blind.

Sarah Baley, Derinda's oldest child, married James A. Clark on February 11, 1866. On December 10, 1884, Salvia "Minnie" Baley, her second child, married Joseph Potter. Her son, Nelson Baley, died on December 23, 1886 at the age of 29. Derinda died at home on October 16, 1890 of old age. She was 65.

Being the loving big sister she had always been, in her Last Will and Testament she left her home to her daughter Nellie, as long as Nellie continued to take care of John until his death. Nellie had helped her mother take care of John for years, so she would know what needed to be done. The Will also stated that John's son William, could stay with him in the cottage, if needed, during the winter months as long as he didn't cause trouble. William had been in trouble as a young man and had been arrested for stealing from Derinda in 1887. Nellie married Louis Horick on July 17, 1896. Even though she was never legally appointed his guardian, she did as her mother requested and cared for John until her own death, at the age of 36, on September 1, 1900. His guardian was James Snow, a lawyer, who had been an advisor to Derinda. After the death of Mr. Snow in 1898, John M. Carr, a businessman and fellow pensioner, was appointed guardian. After Nellie's death, her sister Minnie took over as John's care giver. John Belcher died on July 30, 1902. An obituary for John that appeared in the Muskegon Chronicle stated that John had been paid the highest pension drawn by any veteran of the Civil War in Muskegon, and the highest paid by the government except by special act. His pension started at \$4 a month, and was increased several times after special examiners came and investigated his condition. At the time of his death, he was receiving \$72 a month. John is buried next to his big sister, Derinda, at Oakwood Cemetery. Nelson, Nellie, and Minnie (who died in 1927), are also buried in the family plot at Oakwood. Sarah died in 1838 and is buried at Oakridge Cemetery in Calhoun County. As for William, other than getting in trouble a couple more times, I was not able to find out what became of him.

Sources: findagrave.com, ancestry.com, imagesofmichigan.com, mi.gov, Tennessee State Library Archives, flagpro.com, history.com, capitol.michigan.gov, encyclopediaofalabama.com, Brett.Robinson.com, civilwarindex.com, Records of Service of Michigan Volunteers in the Civil War (George H. Turner), battlefields.com, and genealogybank.com (Muskegon Chronicle).