

## **She Was The First Postmistress at Bluffton, Deputy Customs Collector at Port Sherman, A Civil War Veteran, And Married Many Times**

Written by Frances Harrington

She was born Katherine Louisa Hinman in Onondaga, New York, to Sherman A. Hinman and Harriet M. Wesley between 1837 – 1839 (depending on which record you look at). By 1850, the family consisting of Katherine, her parents and two sisters Betsey and Frances have moved to Calhoun County, Michigan. The 1860 census shows they are all still living in Calhoun along with a new brother, Frederick. On 14 November 1860, Katherine married William C. Simmons, husband #1. In September 1861, William (aka Charles Edwards) enlisted and was part of the 5<sup>th</sup> Iowa Cavalry.

In articles that appeared in the Chronicle in 1885 and 1886, Katherine says she enlisted in the military in 1861 and recounts some of her military experiences. Her pension claim from 1909 says her enlist date was in 1862. In other articles, she says she volunteered before entering regular service as a nurse so that might be where the discrepancy lies.

She told the reporter that she joined with Company B, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Nebraska Cavalry. She nursed the wounded after battles at Island No. 10, Fort Henry, Paducah, Fort Donelson and other engagements during that campaign. The next year she worked with the army of the Potomac and later with the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corp.

She tells a story of being captured by Confederate General Zollicoffer, where he called her “that Lincoln wench”, and took her mule, saddle, guns, and hat. He noticed she had on some nice patent leather tongue boots (that she bought in St. Louise for \$25, (\$500 in today’s money) and ordered her to take them off. When she refused, they were forced off from her. Apparently, she either had large feet for a woman or the General had small feet for a man because he tried the boots on and they fit so he kept those too. He said that he had no place for, or men to spare, to guard a woman so he ordered that she be taken back to enemy lines. She was taken by the sergeant and 6 men to just beyond the rebel lines. They left her on her own. She was forced to find her way back to Union lines while walking barefoot in knee deep mud and rain. She commented that Zollicoffer was killed not long afterwards and was no doubt buried with “her boots on”.

She also recounts of meeting President Lincoln at Fort Monroe, in 1864. She showed the reporter a silver pin with filigree work set with a valuable ruby and a dozen garnets that the President had given her personally for meritorious service on the James River during the campaign at Richmond in 1863. (In my research, I wasn’t able to validate this or any of her military claims except that she actually did serve.)

Katherine left the military in April of 1865, and went to her father’s home in Calhoun County, Michigan. Her husband didn’t return after the war and was presumed killed in action, until 1893 when she found out he was living in northern Michigan and had a large family. Records do show that he applied for his military pension in 1870 and that from at least 1910 until his death in 1917 he was living in the Veteran’s Home in Grand Rapids.

On 25 February 1866, Katherine married husband #2, Civil War veteran, Andrew J. Harrington (no relation to me) at Montcalm County, Michigan. They divorced in 1874. They remarried in 1876. They divorced again in 1877.

In Grand Rapids, Michigan, on October 16, 1882, she marries Civil War veteran, John K. Stroud, husband #3. Mr. Stroud had been living at the Veteran’s Home at the time. He died less than a year later in August of 1883.

In 1883, Katherine is living in Muskegon County, Michigan. She meets Civil War veteran, John White and they marry in November in Manistee, Michigan. He is husband # 4. By 1885 she has been appointed Deputy Collector of Customs for Port Sherman, Muskegon. She runs for the office of Postmaster against Joseph David. During this time, she is arrested for assault and pays a fine of \$6. The assault may have been against her opponent because after he wins, the Chronicle reports it was "quite a lively war" for the office. At the same time, she is reappointed as the Deputy Customs Collector. Katherine also works to help veterans fill out their pension requests and get admittance to the Veteran's Home. She became very vocal about the deplorable conditions at the Veteran's Home which was eventually investigated by the Legislature.

She divorces John White on 1 August 1887. In December, she moves from Port Sherman to Bluffton in Muskegon County. Katherine decides to make another run for Postmaster. In January of 1888, she wins the election and is appointed Postmistress for Bluffton. During the year, there is an outbreak of yellow fever among the veterans in Jacksonville, Florida. She requests a short leave from her duties and goes to volunteer her services as a nurse. Katherine had a mild case of the fever in earlier years and is convinced she will be safe from contracting it again. She goes to Florida in September and returns to Muskegon in November. She's only one of two people who volunteered to help from the State of Michigan.

On 14 February 1889, Katherine marries husband #5, William W. Fowler, another Civil War veteran. They divorce in 1890. She is also appointed Notary Public during this year.

Katherine marries husband #6, Edward A. Glasford, another Civil War veteran, on 10 January 1891 in Muskegon. She appoints him as her Deputy Postmaster. He runs a little store in Bluffton where they sell postage in exchange for goods (like vegetables) using the postage as a type of currency. The postal service gets complaints about this arrangement and the couple are arrested in 1892 and charged with "making false returns and unlawful use of postage stamps" (a violation of postal laws). They are both found guilty in District Court. Katherine goes before the judge and because the "statute" regarding this charge is so recent, she is allowed to pay a fine of \$125 (\$3,613 in today's money) instead of prison time. Edward isn't so lucky. He receives a sentence of 9 months in prison in Detroit. The article doesn't say why his sentence was so much more severe than hers but perhaps it's because he was the owner of the store where the crime was committed or they didn't have another \$125 to spare or maybe he had a different judge who wasn't as sympathetic.

In 1897, an article appears in the Muskegon Chronicle with the heading: "HAD SIX HUSBANDS Mrs K L Glasford Has Been Married Seven Times". They interview Katherine about all her 6 civil war veteran husbands. The article states that her 6<sup>th</sup> husband, Mr. Glasford, had disappeared a short time ago and is thought to be living at a veteran's home in Dayton, Ohio. Husband # 5, Mr. William Fowler, had written to Katherine stating, "he knew no one he would rather share his pension money with than her" and inquiring if he could board with her. He been living in Grand Rapids (perhaps at the Veteran's Home) when the letter was written. Arrangements were made and he returned to her home in November. The next year, in 1898, her father, Mr. Hinman, and Mr. William Fowler take her to Huntsville, Alabama, where she says she will enter the Red Cross services. Six months later, the 1900 Census shows her living with husband #6, Mr. Glasford, in Huntsville so he evidently left Dayton to be with her.

In 1909, she files for her own military pension. The pension record shows her name as Katherine L. Glasford, nurse, formerly Katherine L. Kennedy. I don't know where the Kennedy name comes from since it didn't show up anywhere in my research and she never mentioned a husband with the last name of Kennedy.

By 1912, Mr. Edward A. Glasford has returned to the Soldier's Home at Dayton, Ohio. He dies there on 28 March 1912 and is buried at the National Cemetery there.

By this time, if you are like me, you'd probably think that after being married 7 times with 6 husbands, she would be done. You'd be wrong.

On 15 July 1912, Katherine L. Glasford, (age 75) marries husband #7, Jacob VanWie, (age 65) at Cayuga County, New York. I found no records of him ever being in the Civil War like her previous 6 husbands. The 1920 Census shows the couple still living together at Cayuga. He is listed as a farm laborer and she is listed as a nurse for a private family. She is 83 years old.

I next find an article about Katherine, in May 1922 from Scipio, Cayuga County, New York. The caption reads: "War Nurse Decorated By Lincoln To Receive Good Care Rest Of Life".

Katherine was taken in and assisted by agencies in Auburn County, New York, for two days after she was found wandering the streets there. She is returned to Port Byron, Cayuga County, New York, (where she had been living) to a Supervisor, Willis L. Miller. Mr. Miller was on the Board of Supervisors for Cayuga County Public Relief. Supervisor Miller said, "the balance of her life will be spent in comfort and that her tales of being driven from her home were pure imagination".

Katherine VanWie dies 4 months later on 14 September 1922 at Willard, Seneca, New York. Willard was a small town and the home of the state hospital previously called The Willard Asylum for the Chronic Insane that opened in 1869. In 1890 it was changed to the Willard State Hospital and later to the Willard Psychiatric Center. It closed its doors in 1995. Many records of patients after 1900 have been destroyed or are very hard to get from the state archives of New York so I wasn't able to prove Katherine ended up as a patient there but many New York veterans did and sadly, I think she did also.

(Sources: Hackley Public Library (Family History & Genealogy Dept), Lakeshore Museum Center (Jeff Bessinger), Genealogy.com, Newspapers.com, Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.com, The Auburn Citizen)