

## Legends of Freeborn County

### Your donations are our history

#### Legend #65 August, 2005

by Bev Jackson, Executive Director FCHM

Recently, the museum received a most unusual donation - two letters written in the spring of 1865. The first letter is dated April 30 and was mailed from Chattanooga, Tenn.

"Dear wife,

I take this opportunity to write a few lines to let you know that I am well at this time and hope you and the children can say the same. I would like to stop in today and see you and get some potatoes to eat for I do not get any here but I think that I shall in a few weeks for the war is done. Johnson's army has given up for now so there is not any army east of here and the news come here last night that the orders to muster out 50,000 and they think that we will see some of them, but we cannot tell yet but I hope it is so for I would like to get home. I will now in a few days. The captain thinks that we will go home in a few days.

"We were mustered or pay today but we do not now when we will get it but I hope before long for you will need some by the time I get it. I get a long very well without money for I get enough to eat now. I would like to know how you get a long with your work. Can you get your ground plowed. I wish that I could be at home and help you but if I can get home to put up some hay, I shall be glad for I want to get some more stock this fall. I have got enough of war if I get home once more I will be all right. The times look a good deal better now than they did. Every thing is coming down. With the war my Bounty will go a good deal further than it would last fall. That makes it better for us.

"Well Joanna it was my birthday yesterday. I suppose you thought of it. I thought that if I had been home I would had something good to eat if nothing more but I shall be at home before long at the least. I am to work on a magazine now it is not hard work. I hope I shall get a letter from you this week for I want to hear from you. I shall look every mail for one. I suppose that you have got the letter that I sent with rings in for the girls. If you have what do the girls say to them. Tell them that I shall expect a kiss for them when I get home. Tell Nora to save me some eggs for pa will want to have some to eat when he gets home. Well Jane and Nora be you go to school this summer and learn. I hope you will I will want to hear you read when I get home. Well Elbridge can you get the corn planted this spring. If you can I hope that I will be at home so to help you hoe it. If not I will be so to help you husk it. If do not think of any more to write at this time. I will again next Sunday and if I find out when we will come home I will be before.

This is from your loving husband, N W Campbell"

Our records show that in 1865 the Campbell family consisted of Nehemiah and wife Elizabeth J. (thus the name Johanna in the letter), son, Eldridge, born in 1851, daughters, Mary Jane, born in 1854, and Lenora, born 1859, and another son, Rodney, born in 1863. Another daughter Lucia Augusta was born in 1856 and died in 1862.

The second letter in that donation is dated June 16, 1865 and is from the Army of the Cumberland, Chattanooga, Tenn., Co. D, First Minnesota Heavy Artillery.

" Mrs. N. W. Campbell -

"Thinking a few lines from me would be very acceptable so I am determined to write you a few lines in relation to your husband as a token of friendship. I have this day erected a head board and foot board with the description of Co. and Regt. Name and age w. sec. Grave 554. Died, May 19, 65 with chronic diarrhea. He is buried in the U.S. Cemetery at Chattanooga, one of the handsomest cemeteries in the U.S. As there has been millions of dollars spent on it - I was sick at the time of his sickness so I could not go over to see him yet I saw him 2 weeks before he died. I feel to mourn the loss of your husband. May God be with you in your future affairs and assist you as is the wish of your friend.

Ord. Sergt. O. Andrews"

As with most historic records there are some inadequacies - the exact date of death, the name of the company in which Nehemiah served, the spelling of the children's names.

There discrepancies really don't matter. What does matter is that we know these early settlers as real people, a soldier who was anxious to return to his family and a wife and children who missed him terribly. What also matters is that we remember this family who moved to the Hayward area in 1858, that Hayward's first post office was on their farm and Elizabeth was the first postmaster, that generations later descendants are researching their family history, and that they cared enough to share these beautiful letters with everyone who cares to use the archives at the museum.

In recent weeks we have received a number of donations - a horrendous looking back brace, an ozone generator, model trucks bearing the names of Wilson & Co. and Farmstead, two World War I uniforms and a gas mask, a solid oak bed owned by the Ruble family for five generations and dating back to the ancestors that settled in Freeborn County, numerous books, and several other items.

As our display and storage areas become more and more crowded, I sometimes flinch when someone walks in the door with an item to donate. How do we display it? What shelf can we squeeze it on to? Is there room in the library for one more file? No matter how crowded we become, the answer to these donations has to be "Yes." This is our history. This is who we are. And whether the item is strange, or newsworthy, or sentimental, we know it as a place, and for your generosity we are grateful.