



James G. Medler and Elizabeth (Clark) Medler

CHAPTER 2

Grandpa and Grandma

Medler

Polly's grandparents on her mother's side were JAMES GIBS MEDLER (born in 1833) in Canada and ELIZABETH *CLARK* MEDLER (born 1845) in "Pottersille" or Pottsville, Pennsylvania. She was twelve years younger than James.

James Medler's journey from Canada to Michigan is shrouded in mystery, but we do know that his father made the move from Nova Scotia to Grand Rapids, Michigan, possibly bringing James and his one year older sister, Esther Caroline *Medler* Benson along with him. It was not until James enlisted on 13 August 1862, at White River for 3 years at age 29 and mustered 28 August, 1862 joining the 5th Cavalry Regiment of the Michigan Brigade Union Army in Detroit on 30 August 1862, that we have a definite timeline of his whereabouts.

Why did James or anyone enlist to be in such a brutal war? A study of Civil War volunteer motivations by historian, Justin T. Howell from reading diaries found that primary motivations of the thrill of combat, adventure, and hatred of the enemy served as the initial motivations of a diverse population of Western New York. To sustain in combat the impulses of courage, self-respect and group cohesion were the main sources of motivation. Duty, honor, patriotism, and ideology and religion also functioned to some extent. Also when they signed up, northerners initially thought the war would be short.

Unit records list James' home as LeRoy, Michigan. His enlistment in the Union Army was a perilous undertaking. He was part of one of the most dangerous units of the Union Army, with the highest casualty rates, led by the infamous General Custer. It was the most dangerous period of his life and luckily he survived the brutal conflict. After the war, in late 1865 he returned to Michigan.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth had also made her way to Michigan from Pennsylvania in 1862, settling in "Little Point Sauble" or Little Sable Point, which was approximately 80 miles west of Trufant and 85 miles south west of LeRoy. It was in this area where James and Elizabeth would cross paths, tying the knot in 1865, presumably in Little Sable Point. It must have been love at first sight between them as the only time they might have had together before marriage was seven months in 1862 and or three months in 1865. At the time of their marriage James was 32 years old and Elizabeth was 20.

Marriage patterns in north America were such that women and men married earlier than in Europe, partly because there were more resources in America. Between 1800 and 1849 in England men married at 28 and women at 25 on average. In New England for the same period it was 25 for men and 21 for women. They not only married younger but also had nearly double the number of children (8 versus 4 in Europe) for the same reasons. James was 7 years older than the American average age at marriage and Elizabeth was a year younger.

The Civil War made things difficult, but people still enjoyed weddings, even in the south with wounded soldiers everywhere, there were young soldiers and doctors who spent the evenings dancing. Women, if they could get them, wore big dresses. Brides started wearing white in 1840s, but mainly the wealthy. The average woman wore her best dress, which more often was colored fabric. For young women who married soldiers, a wedding was often hastily pulled together affair, sometimes at military encampments.

Dresses were usually full, made of cotton and silk. In the south cloth was scarce and expensive and wedding gowns were gigantic and took an awful lot of cloth, so many reused materials from other clothes or even drapes to make wedding gowns. It is not clear how people could procure so much extravagant material during a war. One commentator observed, "Surely brides have not changed in a 150 years—a determined bride will find a way."



Women's magazines offered guidance for brides whose weddings were around the time of funerals or mourning. The choice of style was up to the bride. Some preferred to focus on a bright and happy new life and others on an act of general mourning for Civil War casualties.

As there was so much death, illness and so many injured, some women decided to wear grey and black in sympathy for the suffering around them. Grooms who were or had been soldiers in the army often wore their uniforms. James most likely wore his Quartermaster Sergeant's uniform. One bride thus married said, "No man ever wore a costume more becoming or one which reflected more honor on its wearer."



Several years following their wedding, the couple moved to the town of Nelson, Kent county, where they lived for five years and welcomed two sons, Samuel H. Medler and Albert Medler, both born in 1868, and a daughter, Myrtle Mary Medler, born in 1874, who would later become Polly's mother. Together James and Elizabeth had three children over a span of 6 years.

Samuel H. Medler was born 1868 and died 1950 (aged 82) Meridian, Ingham County, Michigan. He was a the father of 2, one boy and one girl. He was buried in Trufant, Michigan.

Albert Medler was born 26 May 1868 and died 26 October 1941 (aged 73). He married and was the father of 6, five boys and a girl. He was buried in Coral, Michigan.

Myrtle Mary Medler was born 1 January 1874 and died 27 May 1944 (aged 70). She married and was mother of 5, two boys and three girls. She was buried in Trufant, Michigan.

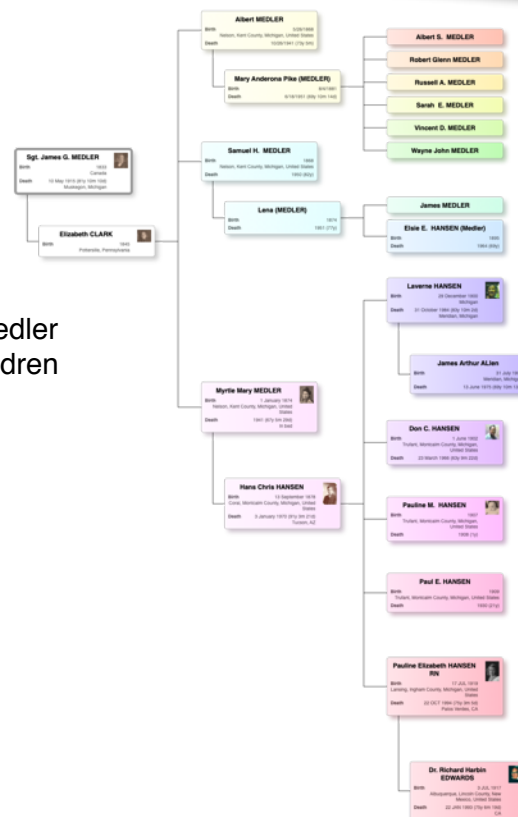
In 1875, the family relocated to the town of Spencer, where Myrtle was born and twenty years later, in 1895 they landed in Trufant for ten years, where James held the position of Postmaster, likely in a building owned by the Hansens.

It was here in Trufant where their daughter, Myrtle Medler met H. Chris Hansen, and in 1899 they were married. This crossing of paths of the Hansens and the Medlers in Trufant was the nexus of our family beginnings. In 1900 James and Elizabeth had a granddaughter, Laverne Hansen, and in 1902 a grandson, Don Hansen.



Front seat: H. Chris Hansen driving, James Medler, Back seat: Don Hansen, Vernie Hansen, Myrtle (*Medler*) Hansen about 1906

QuarterMaster Sergeant Medler and Elizabeth Medler's Children and GrandChildren



Eventually, in 1905, the Medlers made yet another move, this time to Muskegon and settled at 19 Ransom Street. Sadly, Elizabeth died just three years after their move, at the age of 63. She had been struggling with Tuberculosis for six months. James then resided in Muskegon with his daughter Myrtle and son-in-law, H. Chris Hansen.

Civil War

James Medler, a member of the 5th Michigan Cavalry Regiment Company F, served under General George Armstrong Custer during the Civil War. Medler's regiment was part of the renowned Michigan Brigade in the Union Army. He joined on 13 August 1862 at the age of 29 in White River, Michigan and mustered-in to his unit as a Private at Detroit on 28 August 1862, made Corporal by 3 December, one of 151 enlisted men commanded by 4 officers. His unit participated in the defense of Washington D.C. before joining the Army of the Potomac in June 1863.

James G. Medler Dates of Rank

13 Aug 1862 - Private
3 Dec 1862 - Corporal
Sep 1863 - Seargant
Feb 1864 - Quartermaster Seargant
7 Mar 1865 - 2nd Lieutenant
22 Jun 1865 - Mustered out as QM. Sgt.

Non-commissioned officers (NCOs) were important in the Union Army in maintaining the order and alignment of formations during marches, battles, and transitioning between the two. By September 1863 James made Seargant. Sergeants in particular were vital in this role as general guides and their selection ideally were reserved for the most distinguished soldiers. By February 1864 James became a Quartermaster Sergeant.



As a Quartermaster Sergeant, James was the second most senior NCO in his company after the First Sergeant. It was a critical position because the army could not function without food, ammunition and supplies available to its troops—logistics. He was responsible for overseeing the company wagons and all their supplies. This included the company mess gear, tents, ordnance, library, provisions, and tools. He was also

responsible for the camp set-up of tents and picket lines. He inspected company horses, acquired forage, and signed for custody of uniforms and equipment. He knew line NCO drills but wasn't in a command position. During combat, he protected the company wagons and fought to defend company property. In an extreme emergency, he could be used to replace a fallen line NCO. He wore three yellow chevrons on each sleeve of his uniform.

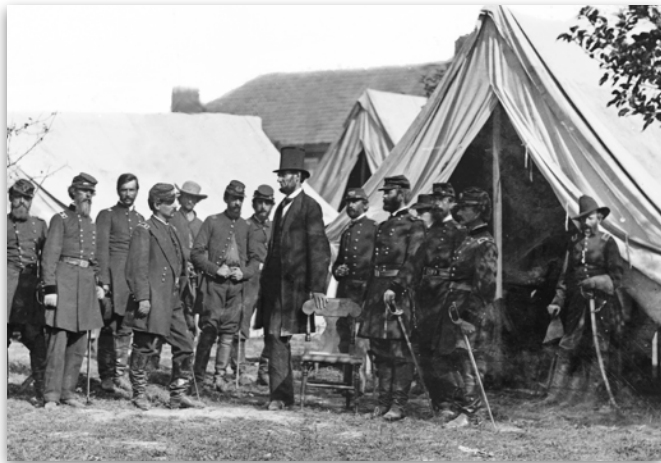
Supplies for the company were carried by wagons. The 151 enlisted and 4 officers each required 3 pounds of food per day, or 465 pounds. For a 10 day engagement that is 4,950 pounds of food. Each wagon could carry up to 2,600 pounds maximum, but less if they had to cross rivers or go up hills. Each horse or mule required 26 pounds of forage and grain, so the typical 6 mule wagon would need 156 pounds per day. or 1,560 pounds of mule fuel per wagon for 10 days, although sometimes forage could be found along the way. Then there were 12 cavalry men to a tent and 4 officer tents, so 17 tents for the company at 176 pounds per tent, or 2,922 pounds of tents. Ammunition depended on anticipated battles, often exceeding that actually used. So for 10 days at least 6 wagons were required, not including ammunition, and other supplies. Teamsters to drive the wagons were often black as they were skilled with wagons and mules and paid \$10 per month, so were preferred over white teamsters who were less competent and cost up to \$30 per month. Army infantrymen made \$13 per month.



In mid 1863 Major General Pleasonton of U.S. Volunteers replaced political generals with "commanders prepared to fight." Pleasonton promoted 23 year old Custer to Brigadier General and gave him command of the entire Michigan Cavalry Brigade including the 5th, with its 13 Companies.

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

Sgt. Medler, under General Custer, engaged in several significant battles, including the Battle of Gettysburg, where Custer played a crucial role in protecting the Union Army's right flank by repelling Confederate cavalry under Maj. General J.E.B. Stuart. At the East Cavalry Field on 3 July 1863, despite being heavily outnumbered, 2,700 to 6,000, Custer with sword drawn led



President Lincoln with his Generals, Custer far right

mainly for reconnaissance and light duty compared to infantry, however, this battle showed that cavalry could win critical victories.

charges with his men of the Michigan Cavalry Brigade including the 1st, 5th, 6th and 7th Regiments in a fierce, hand-to-hand combat. The 5th Regiment had new Sharps seven shot repeating rifles that played an important leveling role in the battle. Custer's brigade suffered 257 casualties, the highest loss of any Union cavalry brigade in the battle, but Stuart's Confederates suffered 450 casualties in the exchange. Cavalry had earlier been used

Later in July 1863, Medler and the 5th Michigan Cavalry faced peril in Abbottstown, Pennsylvania, where they engaged in a brutal battle against Confederate forces. The Michigan Cavalry outmaneuvered the enemy by luring them into a deadly trap, baited with Custer and mounted soldiers of the 5th half of whom were killed, but ending in the slaughter of hundreds of the Confederate troops.

In 1864, under the command of Major General Philip Sheridan, Custer led the "Wolverines" in the Shenandoah Valley, participating in the Valley Campaigns of 1864 when civilian populations were specifically targeted. They took part in several key battles, including the Battle of the Wilderness, Battle of Yellow Tavern where rebel Gen. J.E.B. Stuart was mortally wounded. After defeating Confederate Lieutenant General Jubal Early's army in the Valley, Sheridan and Custer returned to the Siege of Petersburg where they spent the winter.

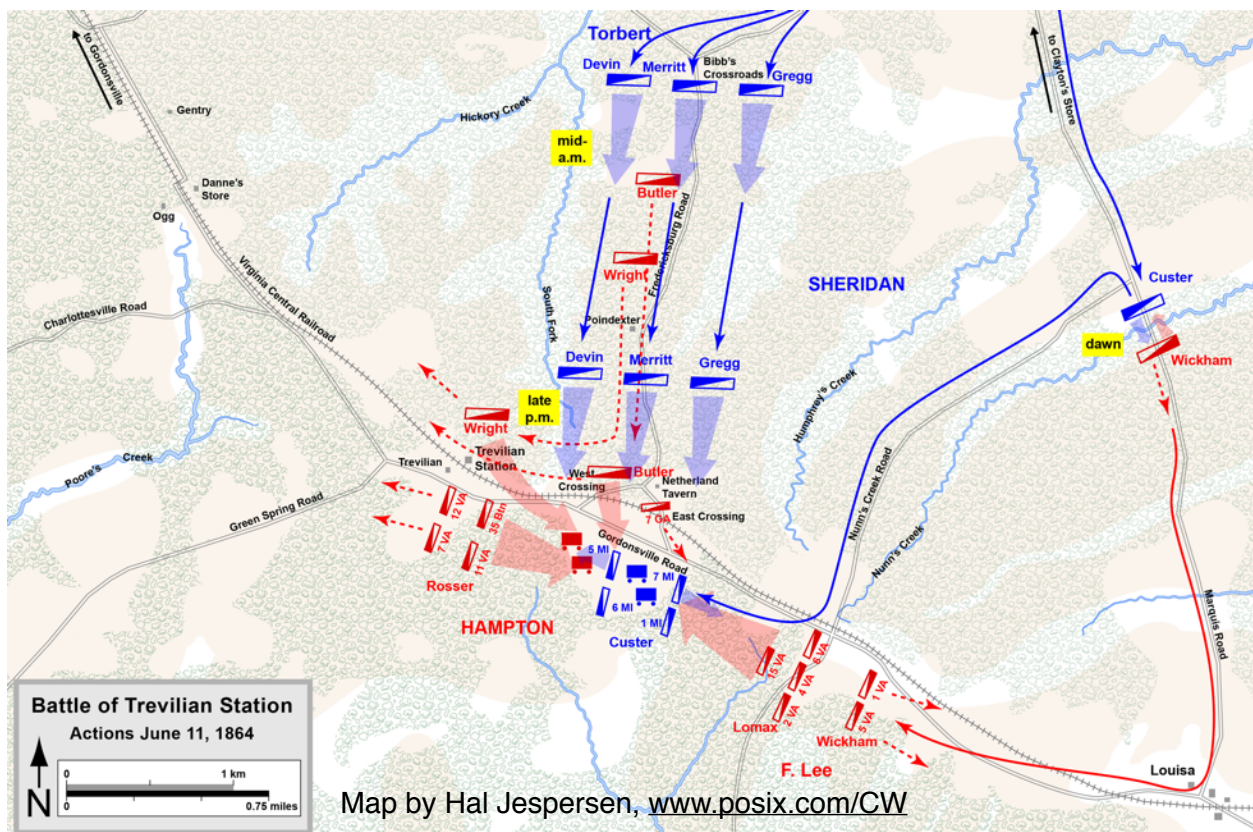


The author at Gettysburg's East Cavalry Field with the Michigan Cavalry Monument in the background during a solar eclipse 8 April 2024.

The Battle of Trevilian Station, Virginia

In the Battle of Trevillian Station, the bloodiest and largest all-cavalry battle of the Civil War, on 11 June 1864 Brigadier General Custer found himself at the rear of Confederates with 50 of their lightly guarded wagons in sight. The sight of Major Gen. Hampton's entire train – a tantalizing prize, sent the “boy general's” innate aggressiveness into instant overdrive. He immediately led the Wolverines to attack. Four hundred mounted troopers thundered forward with sabres drawn, moments later, the rest of Custer's men joined the charge and took the wagons, about 1,000 horses and some confederates captive. The officer responsible for the wagons asked Custer if he could take his prize to the rear. The distracted Boy General said, “Yes, by all means.” Relieved, the officer left to lead the wagons to safety. As he rode off, one member of the 7th Michigan heard Custer inquire, “Where in hell is the rear?”

Confederate Major General Hampton saw Custer's attack from a hill and ordered General Thomas Rosser to attack. Interestingly Rosser and Custer were friends at West Point.



Confederate Major General Fitzhugh Lee's division entered the fray from behind Custer and circled the Union position. Soon Custer and his 5th Michigan Cavalry were surrounded.

There was nothing Custer's Wolverines could do now except fight for their lives. Many of his men were killed. The event was later referred to as Custer's First Last Stand.



Charge of the Confederate Cavalry at Trevilian Station (1891) by James E. Taylor, a Union soldier. Depicts the attack of Rosser (raised hat) on Gen Custer (near falling flag) with fighting over the wagons in background." From Rossiter Johnson's 1896 book, *Campfire and Battlefield: history of the conflicts and campaigns of the great Civil War in the United States*.

After repulsing several Confederate attacks Captain Amasa Dana, an aide to

General Alfred Thomas Torbert discovered Custer's dire situation and alerted Gen. Wesley Merritt who scrambled his cavalry brigade and galloped to the rescue. In the process the Confederates retook their wagons and captured many of Custer's including his own command wagon. Quartermaster Sergeant James Medler undoubtedly had a central role in that fight since it involved the wagons he protected. He was listed as missing in action that day. In the painting

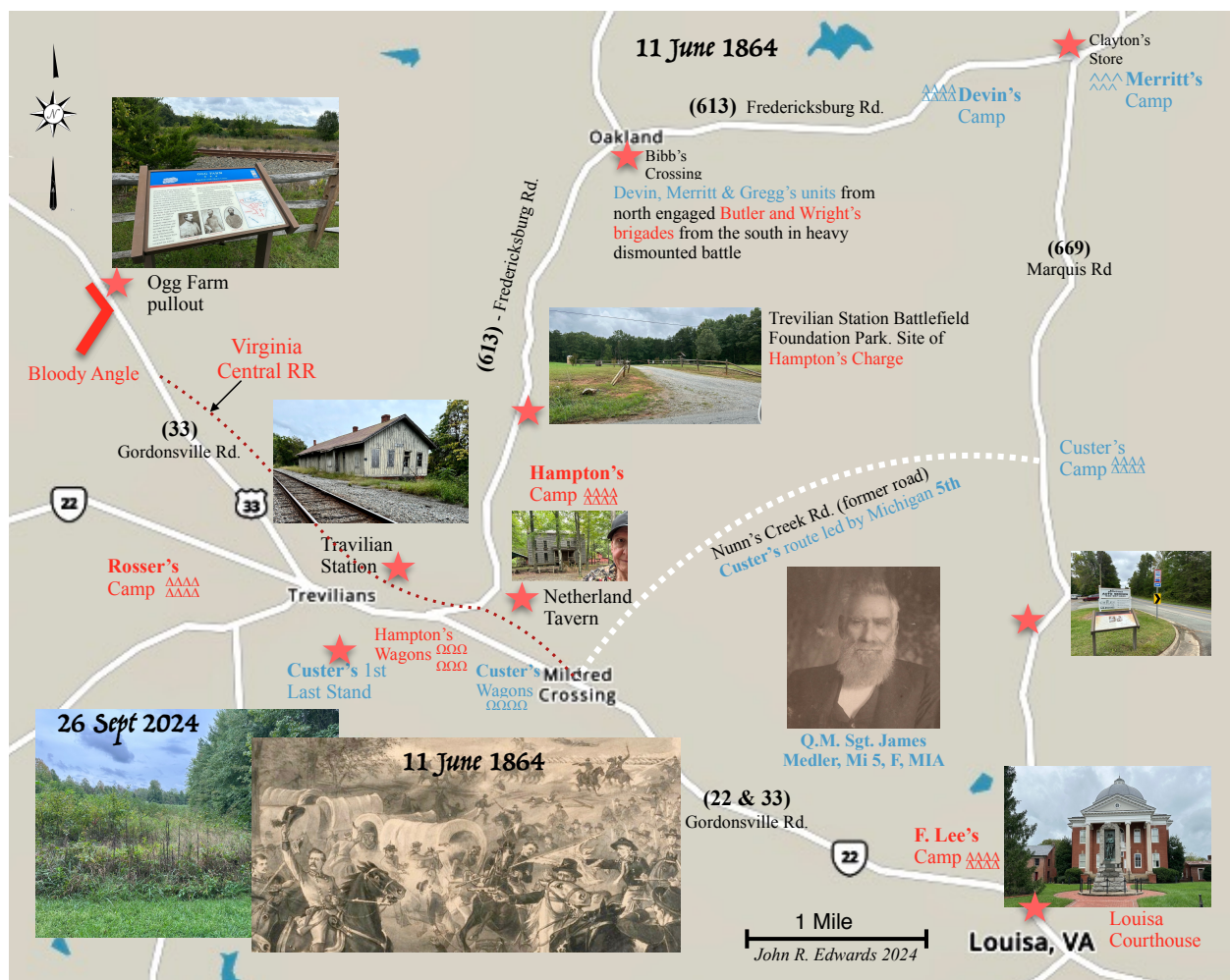


of the Confederate attack above, note the fighting by the wagons. After rescuing BGen. Custer's force, Gen Sheridan's forces took the Trevilian Station by evening. National Archive records state that on 11 June 1864 Qmaster Sgt. Medler's private horse and equipment were lost in action for which he was later paid \$175. Full archive records are in the Appendix.

On the following day the Confederates had dug in near the Virginia Central Railroad embankment in an angled line where the repeated Union attacks were effectively repelled. Gen. Sheridan's force managed to tear up five miles of the railroad tracks, but were unable to dislodge the Confederates, disable the railroad enough to block Confederate supplies or make progress toward Charlottesville, but they did give General Grant a diversion that allowed his army to cross

the James River. Gen. Sheridan's force including Custer's Michigan 5th retreated back to join General Grant's Army of the Potomac by late June.

Some time in July or later Quartermaster Sergeant James Medler miraculously found his way back to his unit, probably near James River or Deep Bottom. A 9 July 1864 field report of headquarters, Fifth Michigan Cavalry by Col R.A. Alger reported that 28 men cut off from his unit at Travillian Station made it back to his unit. James must have endured the same type of hazards making his way back, but probably alone. *"The 28 men cut off from my column near Louisa Court-House abandoned their horses, and after remaining in the woods two days, started on foot, via Morton's Ford, on the Rapidan, for Alexandria, where they arrived after a week's hard marching. The whole distance was made in the night, they secreting themselves in the woods during the day, subsisting upon a very small amount of corn meal, obtained from negroes. Their names are not among the missing in the list affixed, but reported separately."*



I spent a day in Louisa, Virginia and Trevilian Station following driving tour instructions provided by the Trevilian Station Battlefield Foundation. I took pictures at the sites and assembled them into the map above. The organization owns much of the land of the battlefields and also the Charles Goodall Trevilian House that is open twice a week, located right next to Trevilian Station.



James must have done something significant in the Battle of Trevilian Station, or in the following weeks, **or months** because he was given a rare honor. Battlefield commissions are prestigious honors, bestowed upon enlisted soldiers who demonstrate exceptional leadership and heroism in combat. These rare promotions elevate enlisted soldiers directly to commissioned officer status, acknowledging their extraordinary contributions to the war effort. James was given such an honor and was Commissioned as a Second Lieutenant 7 March, 1865.

Curiously, Custer and Rosser remained friends during the war and played as though it were a game. In the October 1864 Battle of Tom's Brook Custer repaid Rosser for Trevilian Station. For no tactical reason, Custer chased Rosser's troops for 10 miles, known as the "Woodstock Races" in Union accounts and captured Rosser's private wardrobe wagon. Rosser immediately messaged him. *"Dear Fanny, You may have made me take a few steps back today, but I will be even with you tomorrow. Please accept my good wishes and this little gift—a pair of your drawers captured at Trevilian Station."* Custer then shipped Rosser's gold-laced Confederate grey coat to Rosser's wife with a reply. *"Dear friend, Thanks for setting me up in so many new things, but would you please direct your tailor to make the coat tails of your next uniform a trifle shorter. Best regards, G.A.C."*



Union Victory

During the final days of the war In April 1865, the Confederate lines finally broke, and Robert E. Lee began his retreat to Appomattox Court House. Custer's division played a critical role in blocking General Robert E. Lee's retreat and ultimately contributed to the Confederate surrender at Appomattox.

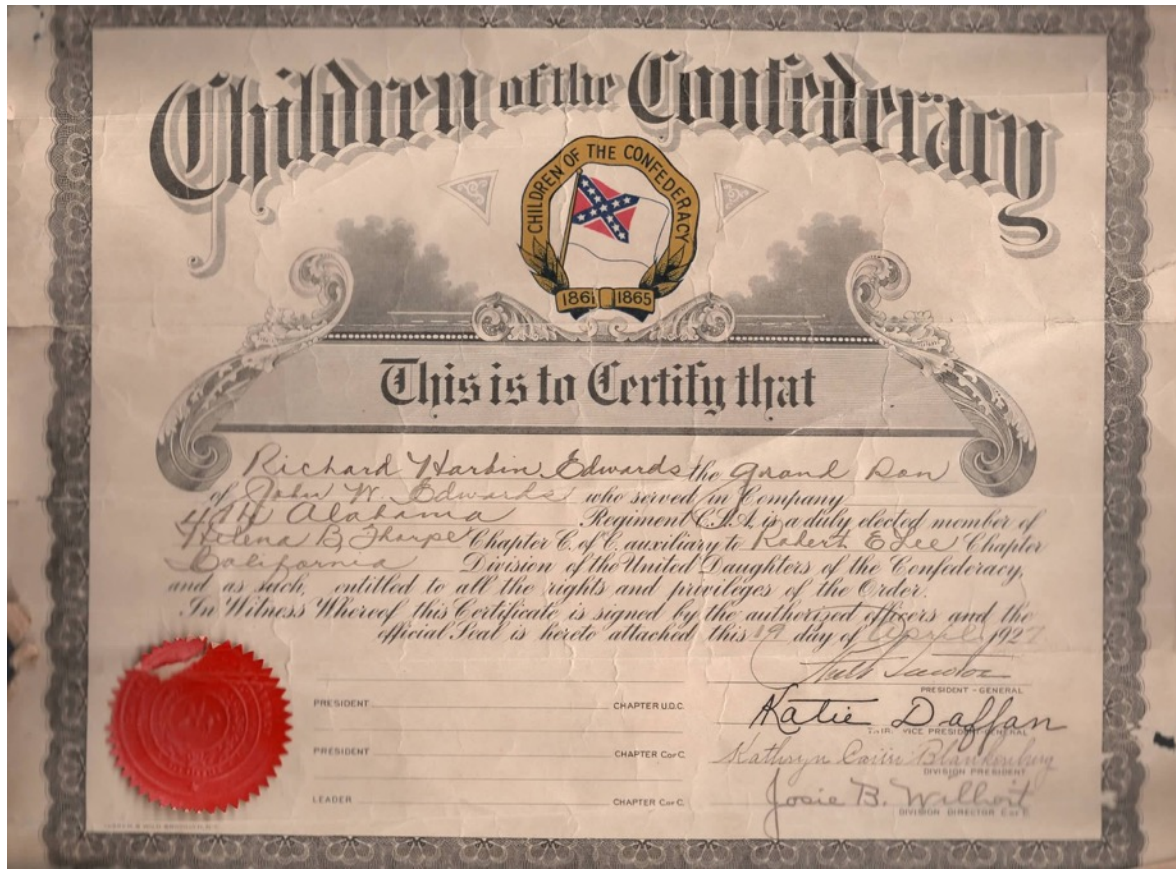
Custer was present at the surrender at Appomattox Court House, and the table upon which the surrender was signed was presented to him as a gift for his wife by Maj Gen. Sheridan, who included a note to her praising Custer's gallantry. The historic table is now in the Smithsonian Institution.

James, having been part of both General Custer's and General Sheridan's units, likely took part in the Grand Review of the Armies after the Union's triumph in the Civil War. This momentous military procession and celebration occurred in Washington, D.C., on 23-24 May 1865. As the Union Army marched through the capital's streets, they were met with cheers and praise from spectators and officials, including President Andrew Johnson, who had taken office only a month earlier following the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln.

Throughout its existence, the 5th Regiment counted 1,586 soldiers among its ranks. With 466 fatalities, including 6 officers and 135 enlisted killed in action or mortally wounded, and 3 officers and 322 enlisted men who died of disease, the Fifth Michigan stands out among other Michigan Civil War regiments. This high rate can be attributed to General Custer's bold, risk-taking and yes, reckless leadership, as well as the regiment's crucial role in ten major battles against Confederate forces, which eventually led to the surrender of General Lee's Confederate Army.

Following the war, on 1 June 1865 the 5th Regiment traveled to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. James was mustered-out of the 5th on 22 June and the 5th was officially disbanded the following day. The veterans were then transferred to the First Michigan Volunteer Cavalry Regiment, which was mustered out of service on 12 September 1865. The muster-out record says He was "Due \$59.74 US for arms, equipments, Bounty paid \$25; due \$75. Remarks: Pay due for one Horse & Equipments valued at \$175.00 lost in action June 11, 1864. Had transportation \$13.20. His muster to take effect upon their arrival & payment at (over) their State Rendezvous, Detroit, Mich. per G.O. 94, War Dept. 1865. James mustered out as a Quartermaster Sergeant with his postwar address as Trufant, Michigan. Later that year James married Elizabeth Clark.

Interesting facts: The American Civil War was the bloodiest conflict in the history of the United States. Over 620,000 American soldiers lives were lost during this war. In WW II about 407,316 American servicemen were killed and in Vietnam 58,220 and about 25,000 in the American Revolution. If Polly's grandfather, James Medler had been killed in the war, Polly would not have been born. If her future husband, Dick's grandfather, Dr. John W. Edwards, a physician in the



4th Alabama Regiment of the Confederate Army, had perished in the war, Dick would not have been born. In either case I would not exist to write this book.

Burials

Elizabeth Clark Medler died 14 Aug 1908 (aged 64) in Muskegon, Michigan, USA. She is buried in Trufant Cemetery, Maple Valley Township, Montcalm County, Michigan next to her husband. Her headstone reads:
Elizabeth Wife of J.G. Medler 1944-1908.
Memorial ID 260519944.

Obituary: Mrs. James Medler died at her home, 19 Ransom street, last night. Mrs. Medler had been sick with tuberculosis for about six months. Her maiden name was

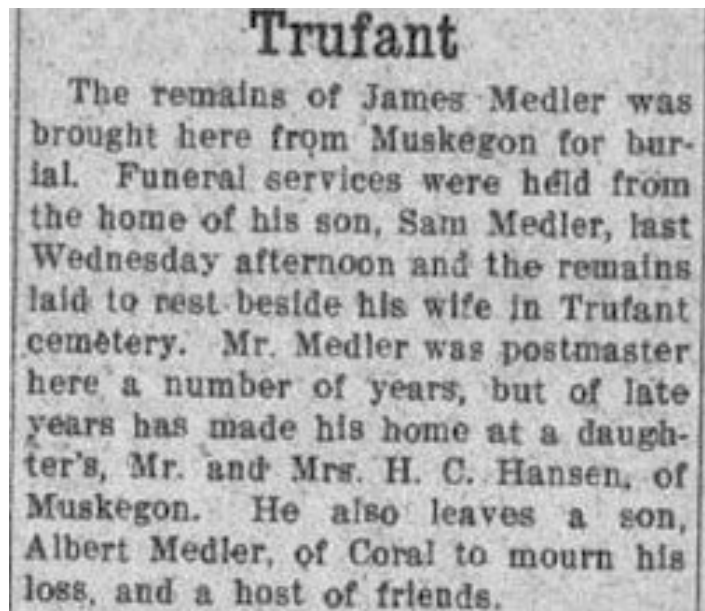


Elizabeth Clark. She was born in Pottsville, Pa., in 1845, and was married to James Medler in 1865. She came to Michigan in 1862, locating at Little Point Sauble. From here they moved to the town of Nelson, Kent county in 1870, where they lived five years. Then they moved to the town of Spencer, where they resided twenty years. From there they moved to Trufant, Montcalm county, where they lived for ten years and three years ago the family moved to Muskegon.

She leaves besides her husband, one daughter, Mrs. H. Chris Hansen, 19 Ransom street; two sons, Samuel H. Medler Spencer, Albert Medler, of Coral, Montcalm county; and a sister Mrs. Anna Haughey, who is at present ill at the home of ex-Mayor Moore. Mrs. Medler was a member of St. Mary's Catholic Church.

James G. Medler died 10 May 1915 (aged 81-82) in Muskegon, Muskegon County, Michigan, USA. He is buried in Trufant Cemetery, Maple Valley Township, Montcalm County, Michigan. His headstone reads: Q.M. S GT. (Quartermaster Sergeant) JAS. G. MEDLER CO.F (Company F) 5 Mich. Cav. (5th Michigan Cavalry).

*Obituary, Greenville Independent:
Trufant*



The remains of James Medler was brought here from Muskegon for burial. Funeral services were held from the home of his son, Sam Medler, last Wednesday afternoon and the remains laid to rest beside his wife in Trufant cemetery. Mr. Medler was postmaster here a number of years, but of late years has made his home at a daughter's Mr. and Mrs. H. C. Hansen, of Muskegon. He also leaves a son Albert Medler, of Coral to mourn his loss, and a host of friends.

He is listed in Find-A-Grave Memorial ID 38828948.



James Medler's parents

Sgt. James Medler was the son of SAMUEL F. MEDLER (born 1803) and REBECCA ELIZABETH STANLEY MEDLER (born 1808).

SAMUEL F. MEDLER was born 30 Apr 1803 in Nova Scotia, Canada and died on 28 December 1891 (aged 88), Grand Rapids, Kent County, Michigan, USA. He was buried at Elmwood Cemetery, Cedar Springs, Kent County, Michigan, USA. Memorial ID 31123930. Samuel F Medler's grandmother was Maria Elizabeth Pussen who was born in 1725 in the Netherlands.



REBECCA ELIZABETH STANLEY MEDLER was born 3 Mar 1808 in Canada and died 20 August 1892 (aged 84), Cedar Springs, Kent County, Michigan, USA. She is buried with her husband at Elmwood Cemetery, Cedar Springs, Kent County, Michigan, USA. Memorial ID 31123937.

There was initially ambiguity about her grandmother as Polly wrote “Mary” Medler on the picture of her grandparents. There was a “Mary” Medler married to a James Medler living 40 miles from Trufant, but her Find-A-Grave indicates different children and different maiden name. Elizabeth (Clark) Medler’s obituary indicates Polly’s mother’s correct name as a survivor, namely Mrs. H. Chris Hansen. Below is the link to the other Mary Medler. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/40400073/mary-elizabeth-medler>

I believe that Polly and H. Chris called Myrtle “Mary” just as I was called “Rick” even though my name was John Richard Edwards. It seems to have been a common practice at the time.

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