

# Henry Waring Blasdel, 1817 – 1895

by Gayle Nevitt Nordlund

All too soon, perhaps, our forebearers become a statistic in the family genealogy. The purpose of this sketch is to relate small human interest events and incidents in the life of **Henry Waring Blasdel** and his family. Many of the Blaisdell Family Association are descended from his family.

## **Patriarch loses son in Civil War**

Henry Waring Blasdel was born near Lawrenceburg, Dearborn County, Indiana. Henry Waring was one of nine children – one brother, **Jacob**, and eight sisters. He married **Catharine Chase** on the last day of December 1839 and was the patriarch of ten children – seven of which survived infancy. The surviving children were: **Huron, Zerelda Weaver, Major Anthony Lee, Bettie, Ella Jane, William Henry and Leonard Chase.**

The Ohio River flows near Lawrenceburg, and the effects of the Civil War were felt keenly by families living on this natural boundary between the North and South.

Huron and Major Anthony Lee, the two elder sons of Henry Waring, joined the Union cause. Both sons were underage and joined without their parents' consent. Huron suffered head wounds and died at the age of 18 in a military hospital. He was buried at the National Cemetery Vicksburg, Mississippi.

Their mother, Catharine Blasdel, still alert and keen of mind, lived to be over 98 years of age and to witness the close of another war, the First World War. Even to the close of her great span of years, I understand the familiar strains of such music as “Tenting on the Old Camp Ground” would bring tears in memory of the “War Between the States.”

## **Uncle Tom’s Cabin**

My own grandmother, Zerelda Weaver, was sixteen at the outbreak of the Civil War. As a youngster I have been fascinated at the tales she told of those years. It was with real feeling she sang “My Darling Nellie Gray” and on her bookshelf a copy of Uncle Tom's Cabin had, obviously, been well and often read. **Henry Ward Beecher**, father of **Harriet Beecher Stowe**, was a minister in Lawrenceburg, Indiana.

Henry Waring and his neighbor, a Mr. Shanks, together subscribed to a newspaper during the Civil War years. No one in the family seems to recall whether the joint subscription was an economy measure or if Mr. Shanks did not read too well. In any event, in the evenings all would gather in great grandfather's parlor, and Zerelda would read aloud of the transpiring events of the War.

Runaway slaves were frequently employed as field laborers by great grandfather.

## **Gallus and Tom Walker**

The Blasdel family had a vivid personal brush with the times the night **Morgan's Raiders** crossed the Ohio River.

Great grandfather's brother, Jacob, excited and in a penetrating voice, was heard from a distance: "H-e-n-r-y! Get up! Morgan is crossing the river!" The family, especially the younger members, was quite startled and frightened at this rude awakening in the dead of night.

Great grandfather – perhaps with his favorite byword – proceeded to admonish his brother to the effect, "Well, Gallus and Tom Walker, Jake, quiet down and let us all remain quietly in bed. There is very little we can do about it, and it is better we let them pass undisturbed. You and I are no match for the Confederate Army!"

As was the custom, weary army horses were exchanged for fresh mounts obtained from farmers in the path of travel. One of these forlorn animals wandered onto great grandfather's land the following day.

Henry Waring loved horses and took pride in those he owned. He would refuse to loan his horses. Rather, he would offer their services to others, but always went along to drive them himself.

Henry Waring had an intense aversion to having his picture taken, and to the extent of my knowledge none exist. At one time he is said to have weighed over 300 pounds. I am told, "It could not have been contributed to obesity. He was a big man!" I believe I have heard a special casket was made for his interment.

All agree that he had a very infectious and winning personality. He liked people. People liked Henry. Little personal incidents indicate a keen sense of humor.

## **First snow dance**

No explanation is offered, but at the arrival of the first snow it was his custom to take off his shoes and run around the house barefoot. Winter snows proffered a favorite sport – sleighing. Many happy hours were spent on family sleigh rides.

**Miss Sadie Hammel** of Madison, Indiana writes of having visited at Uncle Henry's when a small girl and being awakened at night by a very weird noise. After mustering courage to call out to **Bettie and Ella**, sleeping across the hall, she learned the disturbance was only Uncle Henry's snoring. In the morning Uncle Henry was quite dismayed to learn that his snoring had so frightened such small children.

Miss Hammel also tells of a visit of great grandfather and great grandmother to their home in 1880. He wanted a drink and was given a glass of water. He exclaimed, "Gallus and Tom

Walker! Is that all the water you give a big man?" Next day he drove to Madison and returned with a half-gallon glass pitcher, which he used the rest of his visit; preferring to pump it full himself at the well.

"Uncle and Aunt" (Henry & Catharine Blasdel) were great favorites of Miss Hammel's family, and they were saddened when they left Indiana to join their children "Out West."

Evidence would support the theory that Henry Waring had few mechanical aptitudes. His wife, Catharine, on one occasion is known to have relieved his frustration by instructing him in the art of putting a wagon wheel on properly.

### **Cutting the pumpkin**

We can also conclude that he was well versed in directing others to carry out appointed tasks with a minimum of physical exertion on his behalf. One example of this is the family story of the "Cutting of the Pumpkin." From his comfortable, well-located chair, it went something like this:

"Yes, we'll cut the pumpkin. Ella, you bring the pumpkin. Zerelda, fetch me a knife, please. Bettie, I'll need a pan, etc."

Surely, we would have all loved knowing Henry Waring Blasdel. This is written in tribute to his personality in the hope that it will be of interest to his progeny. It is hoped that it will help perpetuate the human side of a forebear that otherwise might soon become only a name in family ancestry.

Unquestionably, the traits and the family life of preceding generations are forces felt, but often unrecognized long after the individual departs from the scenes in which they took part.

I am indebted to **Miss Sadie Hammel** of Madison, Indiana, and my aunt, **Miss Catharine Nevitt**, for the letters with information regarding this article.

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