

Munster's Participation in the Civil War
by
Cindy Watson Badten

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Munster only had about fifty-four families. Seven of which were farmers of Dutch descent. The rest easterners from the New England states like the Dibble's, Wilson's, and Brass's. As the cry went out for volunteers for the Union Army three known Munster men answered the call. There may have been more but their names have been lost to time. The three known soldiers were Jacob Munster (right) and brothers Chancey and Harvey Wilson.



Jacob Monster was born near Strijen in the Netherlands in 1845. He had come to the United States in 1855 with his father Eldert, stepmother Nieltje and two brothers. They had sailed from Rotterdam to New York on the ship Mississippi along with many others Netherlanders who settled in Munster and neighboring towns. The family changed the name from Monster to Munster at some point but Jacob did enlist using the original spelling of Monster. His father had purchased land east of today's Calumet Avenue and north of Ridge Road reaching to the Little Calumet River. Jacob attended school during the months when not needed on the farm as other children of farmers did. He went to Chicago around the age of seventeen to clerk at a grocery store and helped build the Eastern Illinois Railroad as a construction worker. He ended up contracting smallpox. By this time the war was in full force and more men were needed on the battlefields. It was 1864 and he was now about the age of nineteen, so after his recovery he and his friend Henry Schrage of Whiting enlisted. Henry would come back to start a bank known as the First Bank of Whiting, now called Centier Bank. It appears that Jacob enlisted in Illinois in the 30th Illinois Infantry, Company K as a substitute. In other words, someone who had been drafted but did not want to serve paid Jacob to take his place and serve for him. He "recruited" into service as a private on October 18, 1864 most likely at Cairo, Illinois. His regiment had up to this time been fighting what was known as the War In the West serving under General Grant and Sherman and had participated in many battles. Jacob joins them as they are pursuing Confederate General Hood into Alabama. As of November 15, 1864, General Sherman starts his famous "March to the Sea". So Jacob along with about 62,000 other men set out on the road. First to the Siege of Savannah, Georgia, where along the way thousands of Negroes followed the troops, delirious with joy. One pointing to Sherman yelling, "Dar's de man dat rules the world". Every morning the men would go out among the farms, mills, and houses rummaging for anything of use to the Northern Army, often burning railroads and bridges along the way. At one point the Yankees used Confederate money to make their campfires. Sherman marched into Savannah on December 22 nd taking 250 confederate cannons and 40,000 bales of cotton.. His soldiers could now dine on Oyster soup, roast goose and enjoyed a real cup of coffee. In February of 1865 Jacob with the others now moved north towards

the Carolinas. Sherman and his men showed no mercy to the state of South Carolina as they felt that this state had started the war. They burned the City of Columbia, which was the Capitol of the state. They continue north into North Carolina. They face Joe Johnston and his confederate troops at the Battle of Bentonville, North Carolina late in March. During this time the Confederacy realizes it cannot hold on much longer. So, on April 9, 1865, Lee surrenders to Grant at Appomattox Court House, Virginia. Sherman troops are now 80,000 strong and camped at Raleigh, North Carolina. He must get General Johnston to surrender the southern Confederate troops. The two men meet on April 26th at the Bennett House in Durham, North Carolina, where Sherman hands Johnston a telegram with the news of the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Here Johnston surrenders meeting the terms which Lincoln himself had given to Sherman. So our very own Jacob Munster witnessed this incredible moment in history. He goes on to Washington, D.C. to parade up Pennsylvania Avenue on May 23 and 24 for the Final Grand Review. He is mustered out on July 17, 1865, in Louisville, Kentucky, and discharged in Chicago on July 24, 1865.

Jacob returns home to our little village where in 1867 he marries Henrietta Van Mynen. They go on to raise thirteen children. Jacob continues to work as a farmer and then approximately 1870 he opens a Store known as the Munster General Store supplying families and farmers with everything from sugar to dressmaking material. He builds it on his fathers original land purchase on the north side of Ridge Road where the Pizza Hut Restaurant now stands. The mail for the entire area would be dropped off at this store where residents would come to pick it up. This was called a contract post office. The Government on February 5, 1892, appointed Jacob a Post Master. With his busy life he also was a farmer, Road Supervisor, Town Trustee, and School Board member. In 1907 when our little village voted to incorporate into a town it was decided that since our area was known far and wide as Munster due to the mail being delivered in the name of Munster that the town should adopt the name. The Munster family home stood for many years on Ridge road just about where the parking lot for Tilles Furniture store and the BMO Harris Bank now stands. How ironic that our Post Office sits on the original Munster family land purchase. After Jacob's death, his general store went on to continue to be utilized as a grocery store, a used car lot office, and a Munster Parks and Recreation office. It was finally taken down piece by piece, with the timbers being numbered one by one so as to rebuild it at a later date on another site. But sadly it was not to be as every piece disappeared from storage. Jacob died in 1924 and is buried in Lansing, Illinois, in the First Reformed Church of Lansing's Cemetery. The descendants of Jacob Munster graciously gave the Munster Historical Society a coffee grinder and a loveseat, chair and ottoman that had belonged to Jacob and Henrietta and can be seen in a family photograph dating back to about 1890. These pieces are preserved in the Munster History Museum in the Historic 1910 Kaske House at Heritage Park.

Sources:

Ancestry.com

Town on the Ridge, Lance Trusty

The Civil War, Bruce Catton

