

cl. whole for Laurel County, Ky.
by: Feb. 2003 issue

In Honor Of
Cary Lafayette Carter
1832-1892

By Jamie Woods Beecham

In the year of 1832, Cary Lafayette Carter was born to Cary and Mahala Lewis Carter in Henry County, Virginia. In the Henry County 1850 Census, he is listed living with Felix Pratt, a distant cousin, as a farm hand. Felix was married to Patience Wells, and it is through this relationship with Patience's brother Peter Wesley and wife, Susan Wells that brought the opportunity to migrate to Kentucky in 1856 settling in Mershons Crossroads. One of his first friendships in the area was to Moses Spivey, who resided at Mershons Crossroads and how he met his future wife.

Moses Spivey's sister, Mary Jane was born in 1843 Clay County, to Charlie and Elizabeth Browning Spivey. She and Cary Carter were married Dec. 22, 1859 at the Methodist Church by Minister, Wm. Landrum.

In the 1860 Laurel County Census, Mershons Crossroads, Cary is listed as the head of household, as C.L. Carter age 26, born Va. Mary J. age 16, born Ky. Living next door is Moses Spivey and his young family.

In 1861, Cary's first child was born, they named her Mahala, after his mother.

Heeding the call of his country, Cary enlisted in the Union Army at Camp Dick Robinson, in what was known as Coldwell's Company, under Captain and Doctor Thomas Peyton Coldwell on the 26th day of August, 1861, in Co. 'K', 7th Infantry Regiment. This regiment was one of the first recruited in the State and was organized by Col. Theophilus Garrard and mustered into service under the command of Gen. George H. Thomas.

The regiments first engagement was at Wildcat in the Spring of 1862, it was a herald victory for the then struggling Union Army, pertinent in capturing the Cumberland Gap, a vital transportation route for Union troops. Cary would miss the battle due to an illness.

The regiment was ordered south, by way of Memphis, traveling by the Mississippi River and joined forces with General Sherman. In 1864 they joined the Red River expedition under General Banks, and suffered severely in killed, wounded and prisoners. The regiment remained at Baton Rouge on garrison duty.

Cary's first born son Charlie, was born in 1863 while he was on his way to Vicksburg. He was named from Mary Jane's father.

Cary was honorably discharged October 5th, 1864 at Louisville, Ky, completing three years of enlistment, returning home a changed man.

James Thomas Carter was born January of 1866, he was called J.T.

On August 19th, 1867 Cary began the process of obtaining an invalid war pension in the county of Jackson, post office, Green Hall, which he gives as his residence, his age 34. He states ' that while in service he was first attacked with Yellow Janders in December 1861 at London, Ky and after with pneumonia fever which settled into his eyes and prevents his seeing how to labor for a living. Being almost blind, getting

worse and worse". That since leaving the service he has resided in Jackson County and his occupation has been trying to labor on a farm and that prior to his service he was a good and sound physical health and being enrolled as a farmer. That he is now totally disabled from obtaining his subsistence from manual labor."

M.C. Hughes of Green Hall Ky signed the petition as his attorney

James P. Carter and Robert M. Flannery signed as witnesses.

Attached with this petition, dated Oct 21, 1867 is the examining surgeon signed Green V. Holland.

Captain and doctor T.P. Coldwell submitted this in brief, "That I am well acquainted with Cary L. Carter, and that he was in well health and highly respectable when joining the company, and while camped in London Ky, the soldier was taken sick and sent to the hospital, that after revived he rejoined the troop at Cumberland Ford and there he relapsed and was sent to Barboursville, very sick and in recovery his eyes were badly affected and remains so.

The pension of 1867 was declined for inadequate information.

In June 1868, Cary's son, Moses Carter was born named after Mary Jane's, brother and Cary's comrade and friend, Moses Spivey who had died from lung disease in 1866.

The 1870 Laurel County Census;

C.L. Carter age 37 born Va.- Mary Jane age 26 born Ky-Mahaley age 9, James T. age 4 and Moses age 2.

In 1872, Cary again tries for invalid pension, R.T Fuggle of Fayette County Ky, gives testimony, stating " That he was the assisting surgeon in charge of the Hospital at Barboursville Ky and remembers Cary Carter being admitted afflicted with typhoid fever, that he was a very serious case, his eyes were attacked with severe inflammation and he was nearly blind upon leaving the hospital. He states he has had opportunity to reexamine the soldier and that he still is laboring under the severe disease of the eyes."

Dr. James D. Foster, also submitted an examination of the same.

Cary's own words :

" I am the same Cary L. Carter who enlisted in the Ky 7th Infantry co. 'K", that I resided in the vicinity of Mershons Crossroads five years before my enlistment and was a farmer. That I contracted the fever while in service and in line of duty at Camp Cumberland Ford Ky about the 15th day of March 1862 from exposure while repairing the area over which supplies were being drawn for troops stationed there when I became delirious and remained in an unconscious state some 4 to 5 weeks at Harboursville. That when I regained my normal mental power I discovered to my great horror that I was nearly blind so much as to not be able to distinguish features of anyone. I was treated those weeks by Dr. William Gugg who put in for a discharge which failed to come, and I was sent on with others to Memphis Tennessee when I was again retained in Hospital there and operated on for cataracts on both eyes. I was sent on again to finally reach my company at Baton Rouge La in Nov. 1863 unable for duty and remained there until my discharge in Oct 1864 when I

then rejoined my family near Green Hall, Jackson Co. Ky and engaged in farming when I found that I was unable to do manual labor due to my near blindness. I was treated there by Dr. Edwards and found that by remaining in a dark room my eyesight would improve but at the least bit of light or heat made it worse. That perspiration or exercise of my eyes is terribly painful. I removed in Dec, 1868 to Mershons Crossroads to afford myself better medical treatment by Dr. William F. McDowell and Dr. Presley A. Farris. They treated me for a time but were unable to render any relief. I have not been able to perform any manual labor since service but such things as shucking or shelling corn and such as any blind man could do, it does pass the time however. I have to have an aide or another person to conduct me since May 1867.

He list as doctors which have treated him ; Dr. William Gugg- James Foster-Presley Farris- Dr Edward Green -William Mc Dowell and Captain Coldwell. His statement witnessed by Charles Baugh and S.E Baugh Dec. 30, 1879. Samuel Casteel was the justice of Peace in Laurel.

1880 Laurel County Census

Lafayette Carter age 48 born Va blind farmer

Mary J. 36

James T. 14

Moses 12

Loucinda 8

Sarah 6

Eliza 3

Elizabeth 1

In 1880 Census Charles Carter age 16 is listed as a laborer in the household of Joseph F. Baugh, a Merchant and Farmer.

Examining surgeons report by Dr. James Foster gives this description of Cary. His height 5'7 : 150 pounds: age 47; Pulse normal; respiration normal: complexion dark ; I hereby certify that I have carefully examined Cary L. Carter this date of January 8, 1880, who is an applicant for invalid pension resulting from loss of sight. It is my opinion that he is totally first grade incapacitated for obtaining his subsistence by manual labor. The disability is permanent." He has lost both eyes, I do not think he can more than discern daylight owing to a thick harden cataract of both cornea's. He was led to my house by a guide and I find the disability 1st grade.
Dr. James Foster.

Welcome Mullins, John B. Black; Moses Mullins state, Dec. 24th, 1880 that they are well acquainted with Cary L. Carter ,before and after the war and swear that he was without disease of the eyes prior to entering the Service and know that he was a number one shot with a single axle gun and that his eyes are now impaired and diseased and continuously grow worse. That he cannot recognize his neighbors until spoken too.

Also supporting his claim were Silas Flannery, John Simpson, Edmond A. Lucas and Lizzie Spivey. But Cary was not without enemies.. Just as the declaration was near passing, a poison pen of a neighbor halted the process.

Dated April 10th, 1881

Mershons Cross Roads

To; Honorable Commissioner of Pensions Washington D.C.

(The letter follows as it was written)

Sir,

I have the honor to write you in relation to the claim of Cary L. Carter of Mershons X Roads, believing his claim to be fraudulent and unjust from what I know personally and from reliable information. I have lived near neighbor Cary L. Carter for nine years and from his statements to me I am satisfied that he is not justly entitled to a pension from fact that he did no service being absent nearly the entire period of his salary and at the close of the war returned to his command and through the influence of interested parties was restored to the rolls and drew his full pay now deeply interested parties are at work to obtain a pension for him. Parties that he is deeply indebted to in order to secure their debts they are pushing his claim for him. I am not interested in nowise neither for nor against the claimant but those who did no service to their country should have no pension.

Very Respectfully yours-J.C. Moreland

The Commissioner of Pensions sent an inquiry to the postmaster of Mershons of the character of J.C. Moreland whereas he replied;

June 15, 1881

Sir, In regard to your inquiry of the character of J.C. Moreland it might be termed dubious and his reputation for credibility is fair. He is a man of fiery temperment and easily offended and would not, in my opinion hasten to do anything to avenge a near or supposed slight or wrong.

Said Moreland tried to get a power of attorney of the said Cary L. Carter for one J.S. Rowan of Indianapolis and for the collection of said claim and failed to get it and because offended hence his report.

Yours respectfully,

J.F. Baugh

Postmaster of Mershons

The commissioner of Pensions also sent Cary an inquiry, it is as follows:

June 7th 1881

Sir;

In your invalid pension claim no. 128.286 you are requested to furnish a statement under of oath showing where you were and what you were doing from September 1861 to October 1864 whether you were not at the time enjoying good health and receiving good wages as a farmer and in charge of a large number of Negroes.

Respectfully,

Commissioner.(Signature unreadable)

Cary response:

"I, Cary L. Carter, applicant for invalid pension state that my post office for five years immediately preceding my enlistment was Mershons Cross Roads, Laurel County, Kentucky and my post office address for the first year subsequent to my discharge from said service was Green Hall, Jackson County, Kentucky. The post

office Green Hall is near the dividing line between the county of Jackson and Owsley".

Cary's mark X

Frustrated Cary writes the following letter ;

June 22, 1881

Honorable Robert Lincoln.

The delegation in Congress from this State being the Rebel Soldiers or disloyal men the Union soldiers have no one to aid them at home and hearing of the kindness of your father I am persuaded that you will listen to a call of distress. I have been an applicant for pension for 15 years and have furnished loads of proof that I am blind. Lost my sight in my country's service, both myself and children are nearly naked and hungry. Can't you lend me your influence with the pension department in which my claim no. 128286.

Cary L. Carter Co K, 7th Ky Inf. Vol.

(Robert was the son of Abraham Lincoln)

The next page in the pension files is from the War Department. The letter that Cary sent was, 'respectfully referred to the Commissioner of Pension, by order of the secretary of War, signed- H. Crosby adding, " Urging the prompt action of the pension claim no. 128.286"

The Department of Pension to J.C. Moreland, "Will you please return this letter with as much information as you possess as to when and where and how Cary L. Carter contracted the disease of the eyes."

Moreland writes;

I have only been acquainted with Cary L. Carter for nine years and the facts in my former letter were obtained from his own mouth and also from his neighbors and on my first meeting with him his eyes appeared to be diseased to some extent although he traveled where he pleased without a guide but his eyes have grown worse and I must say in justice to humanity he is otherwise diseased and is not able to perform any kind of manual labor but as to whether his eyes were diseased by fever while in the service I am unable to say although I am informed that during his service he followed his usual occupation. I am confined to the house by disease which prevents me from hunting up men who knew him after he was discharged and while in the service and after he left the command he did not live in this county but lived in Jackson and Madison County during his service. I live within a half of a mile of him and have been personally and intimately acquainted with him and his eyes has been diseased together with other organic diseases but I am unable to tell you how or where they were contracted. The records of the war department will show the tale. Any soldier who rendered his country's service and in the line of duty contracted any disability should be cared for by the government and I would not cast a stone his way if that be the case. Please regard this as strictly confidential as this is a peculiar county.

Your Obedient Servant. John C. Moreland

Edward Carter was born March 1886, Cary and Mary June's last child.

Aug .23, 1887

Hon. Wm Dudley

Commissioner of Pensions

Sir, in reply to your letter of 18th of August, I cheerfully furnish you the information desired. Cary L. Carter, the applicant for pension was a private in Co. K, 7th Inf Vol. Whose claim has been pending in your Dept. for nearly 14 years until now the applicant cannot last long and it would be truly gratifying to all good and loyal people of this county if this honorable soldier could obtain the pension he so justly deserves.

Very truly yours,
John C. Moreland

Exactly what altered Moreland's response will probably never be known? However, for every enemy there is often an overlooked friend and that one for Cary was O.T. Azbill, who took it upon himself to write and beseech the government 'to do the right thing'.

State of Kentucky

County of Laurel

In the matter of the pension claim of Cary Carter, late soldier in the U.S., I, O.T. Azbill do certify that I am a physician that my p.o. address is Altamont, Laurel County, Ky, that I am 54 years old and have been practicing medicine for 16 years and on this day the 27th of January 1889 did go to the residence of Cary Carter and carefully examine him. I found soldier suffering from a case of chronic bronchitis with trouble in the left lung. Soldier also has a case of functional heart trouble and he is blind. I have been intimately acquainted with Cary Carter for the last ten years and have been his family physician for a great part of the time and have treated him for each of the aforesaid troubles, several times, but could only give him partial relief. The truth is soldier is a physical wreck. I do not believe he can live but a short time. Soldier is not able to do any manual labor, he has to be waited on and led where ever he goes. I beseech that you do the right thing by this poor man.

O. T. Azbill

Maybe it was the desperate plea of a citizen and a friend, perhaps it was the pressure laden by the Secretary of War or the change of Moreland's hand, whatever the cause, Cary's pension had been a long hard fight not without bitterness from a struggle to long. In the end the Government did do the right thing and back pay Cary for the many years he struggled, setting the pay scale at \$8.00 a month for the ten years the pension had pended. He was to receive \$72.00, commencing March 4th 1890. Sadly he would die at his home upon February 17th, 1892, age 60 years of heart failure. He was buried upon his farmland in the family Cemetery in Mershons Crossroads.