

Seeking John Kiley

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Background

John Kiley is my great-great-grandfather. He and his wife Bridget married in County Cork, Ireland, in February 1847 and soon after emigrated to the United States, settling in Waterloo, New York. The place and date of their landing are not known to me.

The US Census of 1850, Town of Waterloo, County of Seneca, New York, August 22, shows a household comprising John Kiley, age 26, "profession or occupation: cartman", Bridget, 25, both born in Ireland, and their son Cornelius, age 1, my great-grandfather, born in New York. These dates suggest their arrival between February 1847 and November 1848, the time of Cornelius' birth.

John and Bridget had seven children, two of whom died before age three, their names unknown. The remaining children lived to adulthood, including Cornelius, James, b. June 10, 1851; Mary b. December 27, 1854; Margaret Ellen, b. October 31, 1856 and, Elizabeth, known as Eliza, b. October 27, 1858. The latter three children appear in the baptism records of St. Mary Catholic Church, Waterloo.

The 1860 Census shows the family, spelled "Kaylay" including John, 34, occupation "carman", Bridget, also 34, and their five children: Cornelius, 11, James, 9, Mary, 4, Margaret, 3, and Eliza, 1. The Census indicates John's real estate value is \$525 and personal property valued at \$100, suggesting the family owns its home. The Census also shows John is illiterate and that among the children James alone has attended school within the last year. Subsequent Census records indicate James suffered from scarlet fever as a five-year-old, was severely handicapped thereafter and died in his early thirties.

John Kiley in the Civil War

Exploring the Kiley family in the summer of 2010, on a whim I searched the 1890 Census. (That Census burned and is largely unavailable, although some special schedules survive.) I was startled to see a listing for John and Bridget, indicating John fought for the Union, during the Civil War he was "shot and died on the field". The Census shows Bridget claiming his pension.

Additional research confirmed this. Pvt. John Kiley appears in a regimental history, "1000 Boys in Blue", by Arabella Wilson published 1870. His biography in the Wilson history says:

"Kiley, John. Age, 35 years. Enlisted, July 18, 1862, at Waterloo. To serve three years; mustered in as Private, Co. G, August 22, 1862; surrendered, September 15, 1862, and paroled, September 16, 1862, at Harper's Ferry, Va.; Killed in action June 16, 1864, at Petersburg, Virginia."

Pvt. Kiley's military records from the National Archives show a Prisoner of War Memorandum (captured at Harper's Ferry shortly after mustering and paroled soon after that) and Muster Rolls, including the notation "killed in action June 16, 1864". His card biography for the 126th Regiment indicates at the time of enlistment "age 35, height 5 feet 9 1/2 inches, light complexion and blue eyes, born in Belfast, Ireland and his occupation is laborer."

Bridget's petitions for John's pensions, one for widows, a second for orphans, are a trove of genealogical data.

There is a superb modern history of the 126th New York Volunteers by Wayne Mahood, published in 1997, titled "Written in Blood: A History of the 126th New York Infantry in the Civil War".

In Mahood's history, there are two references to Pvt. Kiley. The first (p.211):

"Despite the weather conditions, the familiar picket and guard duty had to be performed. Battle readiness was reinforced by the occasional sounds of Confederates just across the Rapidan River, the arrests of privates John Kiley and George B. Close for neglect of duty, and the discharge of Francis W. Haney, Company F, for dementia. No doubt a more pressing reason for increased vigilance was [General] Hancock's irritation at the casualness along the picket lines that he had recently ridden. His orders for building fires on the lines were intended to remedy that."

Reading on, it's easy to imagine during a miserable winter lived in a tent such "neglect" involved seeking warmth, shelter or a meal.

The second reference describes the circumstances of his death, June 16, 1864 (pp. 280-1):

"The 126th New York, which had been marching and counter marching for approximately 12 hours because of poorly drawn maps and confusingly written instructions, dropped to the ground where they stopped. At 3:00 p.m., barely rested, they were on their feet again and moved up for the assault. Col. Frank ordered the 126th, "formed in double column at half distance" and placed it between the 125th New York on the right and the 111th [New York] on the left. They charged through woods about a half-mile and down into a deep ravine, which gave them a moment of anxiety. Then they charged up the hill and down again, this time into a deeper ravine. The whole time they heard the crack of musketry and the boom and whoosh of the Confederate cannon from behind the second line of entrenchments [roughly a half mile to the west] into which Beauregard's defenses had moved during the previous night. The final charge was the most difficult of all. It was up still another hill that took them straight into the teeth of Confederate fire.

"The fearful fire caused dreadful casualties. Col. Levin Crandall, commanding the 125th, was struck in the face by a piece of shell. Lieut. Col. William Baird, ordered to command the 125th as well as the 126th, apparently was still bent on proving his courage and leadership, and began assembling the line. Before he could do so, however, he was struck on the right side by a musket ball that passed through both lungs. Attended by

Adj. Spencer F Lincoln, Baird remained conscious until his death about a half-hour later. Almost immediately after Baird expired, Lincoln himself was struck in the arm. He died two days later after complications arising from the resulting amputation.

“The 126th drove out the Southerners and charged on until just over 50 yards from the enemy works on the Shand’s farm, where it dropped to the ground and began firing. The New Yorkers once again dug into the Virginia clay in what for some was a futile attempt to shelter themselves from the relentless cannonading, which was making itself felt.

“Losses mounted rapidly. First Lieut. John A. McDonald, Company I, a pre-war teacher, was hit and died instantly, acting regimental commander Maj. Charles Richardson was hit in the upper jaw, rendering him speechless. Second Lieut. Pratt Dibble, Company H, a pre-war clerk, was so severely wounded in the leg that he was sent home. He died almost 2 years to the date as a result of his injury.

“Among the enlisted men killed or mortally wounded during the charge were two Irish-born laborers, both privates from Company G, 34-year-old John Dunnigan and 37-year-old John Kiley. Company C’s private Clarkson Smith would linger for six weeks before he died. Nor were non-commissioned officers spared. Sgt. Daniel W Finch, a member of Capt. Brown’s Company A, who somehow had survived his wounding and capture at Auburn Ford, was wounded again which led to his discharge. First Sgt. Albert Huff (Hough), Company C, who was commissioned but not mustered second Lieut., was hit in the arm, but survived and would be mustered out as supernumerary at the end of the year. Sgt. George B Goodale Company G, a pre-war Phelps, New York carpenter, also was wounded in the charge and would later be discharged.

“Due to Baird’s death and Richardson’s injury, Capt. Morris Brown assumed command of the regiment, Brown faced “a heavy fire” when he moved “from the right to the left and in person ascertaining the position of the enemy upon our flanks”. Despite the musketry that was downing regimental officers and men, Brown managed press on until “we gained the enemies of breast works.” In the words of Col. McDougall, Brown’s conduct “entitles him to a promotion,” and to this end, McDougall “respectfully” recommended to Gov. Seymour[,] Brown’s promotion, which the ambitious Brown fully believed he deserved. As the heroic Brown surveyed the depleted ranks he realized the lack of leadership in the Regiment, but felt a faith that he had never known previously. “I feel different than ever before. I picked up a testament during the Battle of wilderness on 7 May & since then it has been my constant companion.” Whether this was a genuine battlefield conversion or an attempt to reassure his parents of his relative safety is unknown.

“As dark descended, the Second Corps could take pride that, with Smith’s and Burnside’s corps, it had forced the Confederates back and captured the Redans 3, 13 and 14 on the northwest segment of the Confederate outer perimeter. But at a terrible cost.”

Were John Kiley and John Dunnigan friends? Did they die together? Although not from the same town, both were in Company G; both Irish born; both older than most soldiers; they died the same day.

Morris Brown, Jr. was a Hamilton College student who left school to enlist. An ambitious young man, he was commissioned a Captain in the 126th. After the June 16th

battle he was promoted to regiment commander, before his death several days later, at 23. He was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

A prolific letter writer, Brown described the assault in which John Kiley died and refers to his to death:

Near Petersburg Va.
June 18th 1864

Well my dear parents, I am all right yet, but oh! what terrible fighting we have had for the last two or three days. Night before last we (our brigade) charged the enemys works, took three but with some loss. Col. Baird was killed also Lt. McDonald. Capt. Richardson was very severely wounded in upper jaw—probably will not live. Adj. Lincoln has his left arm off & Lt. Dibble badly wounded in leg. Three enlisted men killed [reference to John Kiley] & seventeen wounded. We only have seventy muskets [men] so you can see our loss is very severe particularly in officers... Capt. [Sanford] Platt & I are the only two officers left who were with the Regt. when we left Stevensburg.... ..Such fighting I never saw before, & such narrow escapes I never had. A merciful Providence & a God who hear the prayers of the dear ones at home is certainly protecting me.

...My faith is stronger than ever....I picked up a testament during the battle of the Wilderness on the 7th day of May & since then it has been my constant companion...death has none of the terrors it formerly did. Col. McDougall Comdg. our brigade just told us we probably would charge the city of Petersburg to night....We will try it hard anyway...

Good bye again
Your aff. Son Morris”

Brown’s reference to “seventy muskets” (i.e. soldiers fit for duty) illustrates the tragic state of the 126th. In August 1862 just over one *thousand* men were mustered into the regiment. The killed, wounded, missing, imprisoned and discharged soldiers exceeded 90% of this beginning complement.

By the end of the War, the total of killed and wounded was 535; roughly one-third of which occurred at Gettysburg, making the 126th among the one hundred regiments with the highest Civil War casualty rates.

During the course of the Civil War, the 126th NYVI fought in many epic battles, often in Virginia. The regiment took part in: the Siege of Harper's Ferry, Gettysburg, Auburn Ford, Bristoe Station, Morton's Ford, Wilderness, Po River, Spotsylvania, North Anna, Totopotomy, Cold Harbor, the Battle of Petersburg, Weldon Railroad, the Siege of Petersburg, Deep Bottom, Reams' Station, Hatcher's Run, and Sutherland Station; it was also present in the Mine Run campaign, at Strawberry Plains, Boydton Plank Road, Farmville and Appomattox.

Petersburg National Battlefield

In March 2011 I visited Petersburg, Virginia with the hope of better understanding the Civil War battles there, seeing the place of John Kiley's death and visiting his nearby grave at Poplar Grove National Cemetery. I also toured Gettysburg National Battlefield in Pennsylvania with an eye to the role of the 126th there. I was joined by friend Pietro del Fabro, Princeton Junction, NJ, designer of the American Civil War Memorial, Waterloo, NY (right, with a mortar similar to the famous "Dictator", the largest of its day).



There are a number of resources without which it would have been difficult to have a worthwhile visit to Petersburg. In addition to Prof. Mahood's "Written in Blood", there is just one published history of the day of John Kiley's death, "Wasted Valor: The Petersburg Campaign, June 15-18, 1864" by Thomas J. Howe (who lives near Madison, WI). The generous support from Chief Historian of Petersburg National Battlefield, Jimmy Blankenship, was enormously helpful.

Mr. Blankenship, right, with me at the Crater, and his colleague, Adam Baghetti, were able to superimpose a detailed 1864 map of the Petersburg battlefield on a modern United States Geological Survey map to identify the location of the charge of Pvt. Kiley's brigade.



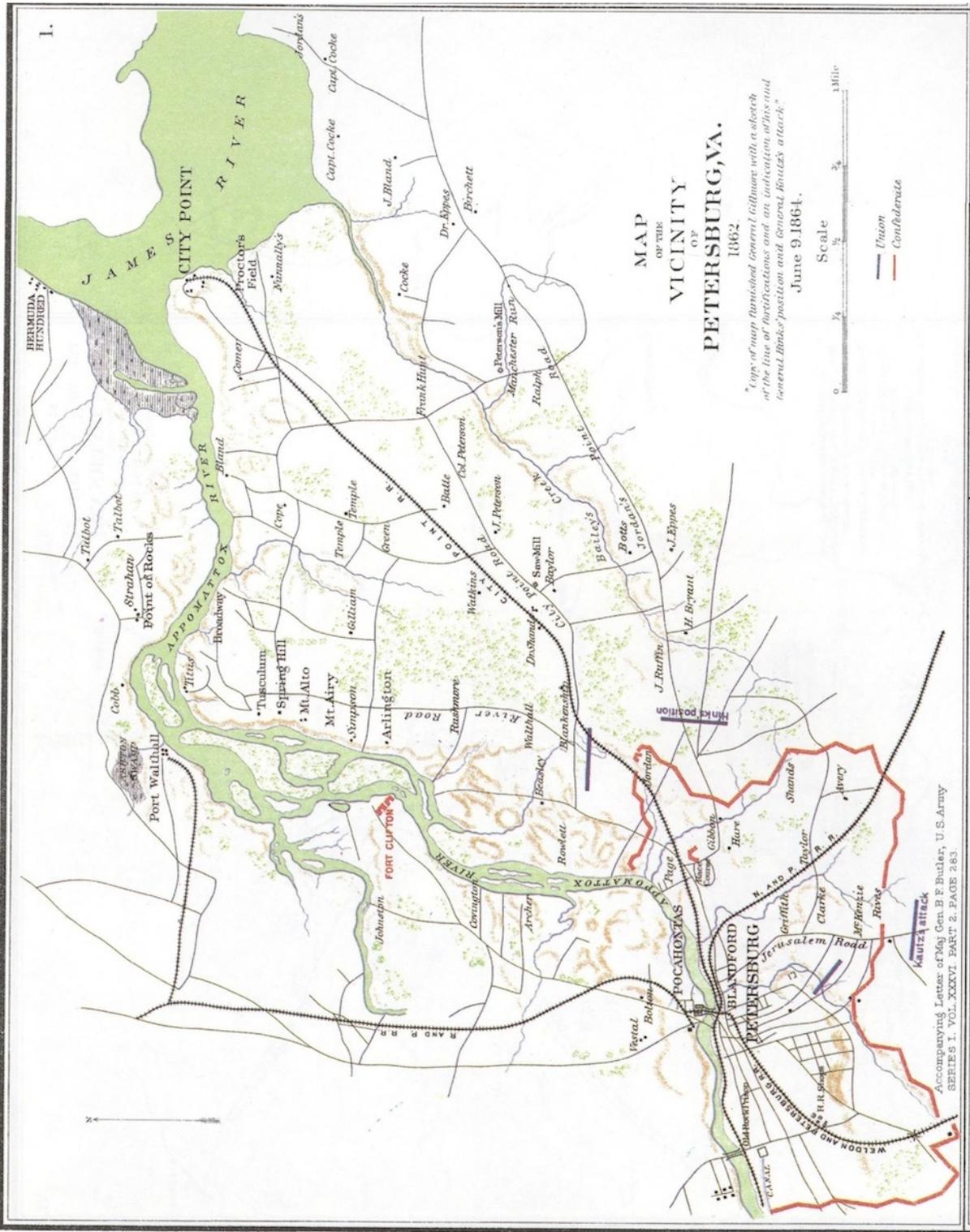
The day John Kiley died is one of four, June 15-18, 1864, often referred to as the Battle of Petersburg (or "before Petersburg"); in contrast to the Siege of Petersburg which began after June 18th and continued until early April 1865.

Petersburg National Battlefield as preserved today includes a small portion of the 176 square-mile area on which the Siege and Battle took place. The area in which John Kiley fought was farmland at the time. Accessible portions (i.e. not military base) are now overgrown and densely wooded. Seeing the topography is made difficult by this dense growth, inspiring my visit in March before foliage emerged.

Following is a map from the "Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, 1861-1865" (the "OR Atlas"), showing the Petersburg area and its defenses. In particular, note the Confederate entrenchments surrounding Petersburg (which were dug before the June 1864 assault, owing to the strategic importance of Petersburg for the defense of Richmond, the Confederate Capital, 23 miles north), and

the Shand farm, southeast of Petersburg. The Confederate defenses in red are the famous Dimmock Line of entrenchments.

ATLAS TO ACCOMPANY THE OFFICIAL RECORDS OF THE UNION AND CONFEDERATE ARMIES, 1861-1865.



Another map of the time, the “Michler Map”, is a detailed Union rendering of Petersburg topography, forts and defenses, now in the National Archives and available digitally. It shows the area in detail and is fairly accurate in the area most of interest here, according to Historian Blankenship. Note the location of the Shand Farm, adjacent tributaries to Harrison Creek (which look as if they are ridges, not depressions on the map).



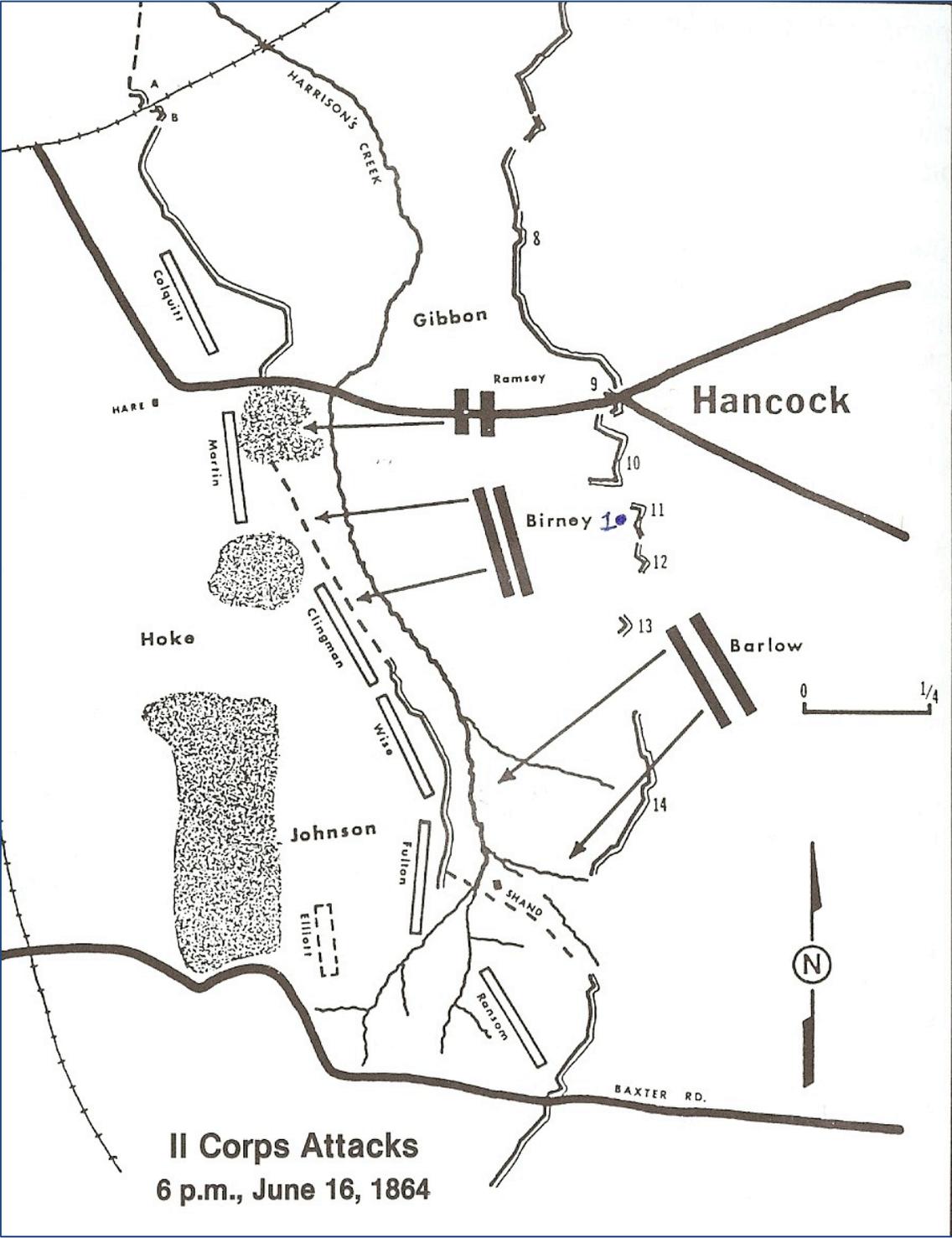
On the adjacent detail of the Michler Map, oriented with north to the left, the Arabic numbered lines are the entrenchments of the Dimmock Line, in red on the previous map.

In the lower right section of this detail of the map is the Shand Farm (spelled “Shind”) and its buildings.

The lines just west of Harrison Creek are the second line of Confederate defenses, from which the artillery fire on the 126th came.

The eventual Confederate line of defense, held until the end of the Siege, is on the western edge of this detail. Union forts facing those lines are indicated by roman numerals.

Next, below is a map from Howe's "Wasted Valor" showing the charge by the Union II Corps, First Division, Third Brigade, comprising the 126th NYVI, and several other upstate New York infantry regiments which often fought with the 126th: the 125th, the 111th, 39th, 52nd and 57th, in their encounter with the 44th Tennessee Volunteer Regiment.



Finally, below is a composite of these maps. It includes the map produced by Jimmy Blankenship's team, comprising the Michler Map and the current USGS topographic map of the area and Howe's map showing the Union charge of the Shand farmstead on June 16, 1864.



The Shand Farm Today

On June 11, 2011 I approached the Shand Farm from the west on foot, beginning on Hickory Hill Road. The farmstead is on a small knoll, now densely wooded. Scattered remnants of a demolished dwelling newer than Shand's several buildings litter the area, but are also long gone, as seen in the photos below.



The easiest way to find Shand's Knoll today is to orient oneself using Hickory Hill Road and the clearing through the trees for a modern underground gas line, which traverses the Battlefield and private land to the east.



Walking to the north, the direction from which General Barlow's infantry division, including the 126th, advanced, I was able to see the tributary to Harrison Creek that formed the ravine that enabled Confederates to shoot down on Union soldiers and forced the Federals to run uphill to the entrenchments. That stream is in the photo on the right.

Below, are two views of the ravine from which the Union forces charged the Shand farmstead. The photo on the left looks to the north, the one on the right to the northeast.



Standing on the knoll of the former Shand farmstead today is quiet and peaceful. The nearest houses are one hundred yards away through dense brush. The only sounds are birds' and background roadway noise from the west. One hundred fifty years ago, before war arrived, I imagine it would have been quieter still: the only sounds from nature and farm animals.

During the War, cannon fire would have often been heard miles in the distance, but the fury of the battles of June 1864 must still have been overwhelming. Soldiers at Gettysburg, witnesses of the greatest artillery duel ever, said the battle there was disorienting: ferociously loud, blindingly smoky.

Members of the 126th fought at Gettysburg, in the most intense places. Yet, one letter home from described June 16, 1864 as "the worst we have seen".

Running uphill toward barely seen, entrenched enemy, amidst falling friends, with a pack and a weapon able to be fired only twice per minute, the reloading of which made one a target, must have been horrifying, making actions reflexive only.

It's no wonder cavalry's occasional task was to patrol behind the lines and redirect retreating infantry, returning them to the fight.

Poplar Grove National Cemetery

Union forces who died in the Shand Farm assault and other battles of the Petersburg campaign were buried nearby, marked and later reinterred at Poplar Grove, several miles southwest of Petersburg in 1866-1869.

Many of the graves contain unknown Union men. Historian Blankenship tells me that during his thirty years at Petersburg Battlefield, only about ten families have found relatives in identified graves. (Nearby Blandford Cemetery has the remains of 30,000 Confederate soldiers, 2500 are identified, but only *seven* of whom are located. An aerial view of Poplar Grove, showing John Kiley's location is below.)

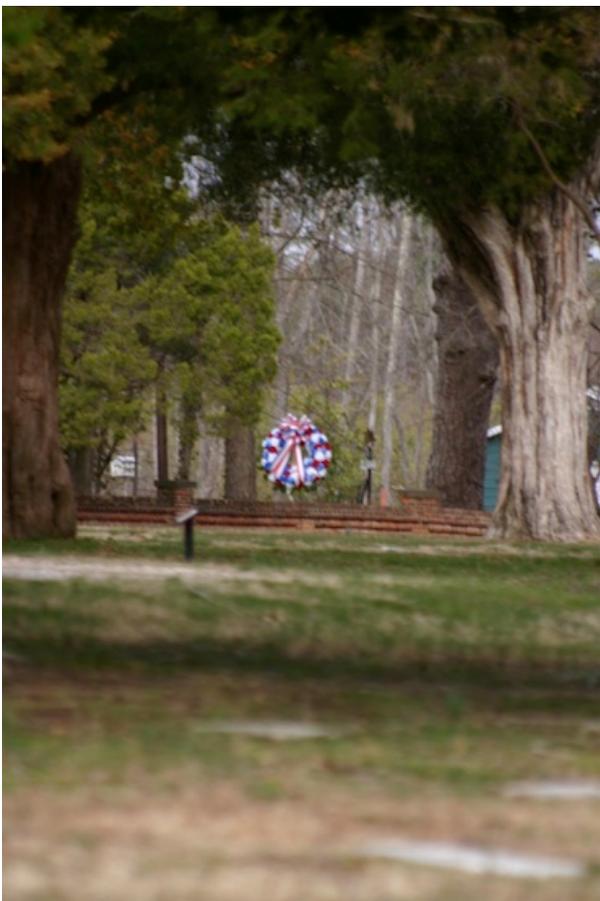
Private John Kiley is in space 1280 under a cedar tree. While there I visited his grave and placed a wreath to honor him and his comrades.



I am not aware of any other family member visiting John Kiley's grave. Knowledge of his whereabouts by modern ancestors was only learned in 2010, with the help of Pietro del Fabro of Princeton Jct., NJ and Ann Blumenschine of Petersburg Battlefield.

Graves nearby include many Unknowns and a Medal of Honor recipient from Illinois.

Pvt. Kiley's last name, while spelled correctly on his headstone ("Jno." is an archaic abbreviation for "John"), was misspelled in the Petersburg Battlefield archives (now corrected), as it is on the Poplar Grove Cemetery directory.

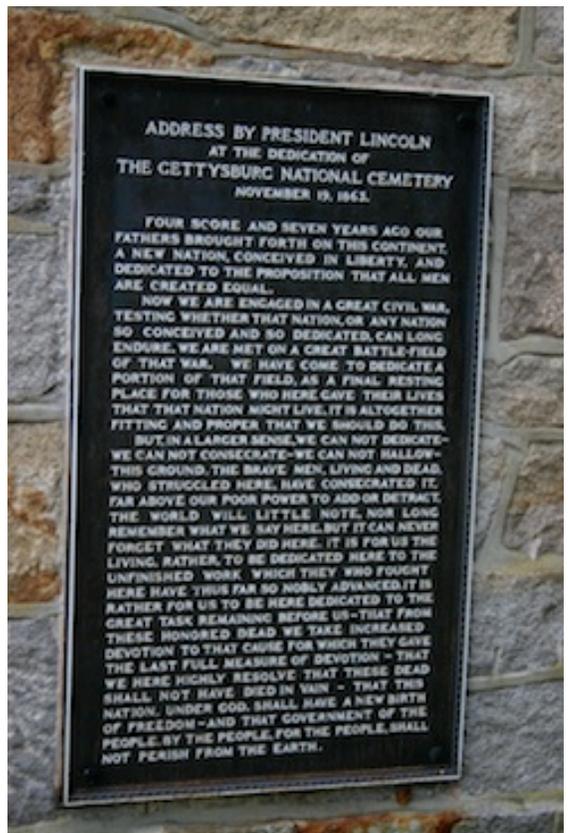


Poplar Grove National Cemetery is nearly as quiet, I imagine, as it was in the late 1800s.

I doubt the Cemetery's appearance has changed much during the past century, except the spruce trees have grown.

There is an artful 1890s wrought iron and brick gazebo (right), rusting, mortar eroding. It sheltered families, women in long skirts, content to linger on a sweltering day, while today it awaits funds for restoration. Arriving by train, then wagon, sharing a meal, the fortunate lay flowers for fallen family, others honor the many Unknowns.

Fittingly, the entrance to Poplar Grove has a plaque of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address; it appears to be the Cemetery's most durable feature: a reminder of the cause that inspired the nearby Fallen.



John Kiley's Family

After the War, Bridget Kiley continued to live in Waterloo with her children.

- The 1870 Census shows Bridget, 45, "keeping house", Cornelius, 21, "drayman" (i.e. teamster), James, 19, "cannot read or write", Mary, 16, Margaret E(llen), 13, attending school, Elizabeth, 11, attending school.
- By the 1880 Census, Bridget is "keeping school", Cornelius has left the household (his oldest child was born in 1874) and is living in Hornellsville, NY with Hannah and two daughters (their son, John, born in 1876, died in 1879). The other children live with Bridget in Waterloo: James ("idiotic, maimed, crippled, bedridden, or otherwise disabled" a victim of scarlet fever), Mary ("house servant"), Margaret ("dress maker") and Elizabeth ("works in woolen mill").
- In what remains of the 1890 Census, we learn Bridget is claiming John's pension.
- In Bridget's pension file, there is a notation suggesting she died May 25, 1897 in the care of her daughter, Margaret, and son-in-law, Edward Dalton, a railroad engineer living in Syracuse, NY.
- Bridget is in St. Mary Catholic Cemetery, Waterloo, having a headstone and burial plot shared with her daughter, "Lizzie", and the Daltons (right).



Waterloo, NY & Memorial Day

Waterloo lost 57 men in the Civil War, a substantial portion of its 1860 population of 4,500. In May 1866 the town held its first "Decoration Day" and has done so every May since. It was one of many such observances begun in the aftermath of the devastation of the Civil War. A century later, in 1966, recognizing its unbroken string of remembrance recognition, Waterloo was designated by President Lyndon Johnson as the birthplace of Memorial Day. Our friends in Petersburg believe their community the birthplace of Memorial Day, too; several other cities also claim this honor.

In the last several years the citizens of Waterloo constructed the American Civil War Memorial (americancivilwarmemorial.com) as a tribute the 57 Fallen and all the men and women of the Civil War, one of the few memorials that pays tribute to both sides of the conflict.

The town erected a cenotaph to honor each of its Fallen, including John Kiley. With my recent discovery of our family's descent from Pvt. Kiley, I contacted ACWM leaders and discovered our family is the first direct descendants of *any* of the Fallen to come forward since the Memorial was created.



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