

William Charles Ritter

Born Feb. 18, 1843 at Minerva, Stark County, Ohio
Died Oct. 7, 1912 at McComb, Hancock county, Ohio
Buried at the McComb Cemetery

Wife

Lydia A. (Mullen) Ritter

Born July 5, 1845 near Zanesville, Licking County, Ohio
Died Aug. 28, 1928 at McComb, Hancock County, Ohio
Buried at the McComb Cemetery
Parents were James & Eliza (Eeker) Mullen

Children

Emma Jane	Born May 6, 1866	Died Feb. 26, 1935
Otilla	Born Dec. 17, 1867	Died July 31, 1886
William Frank	Born Aug. 27, 1869	Died Oct. 11, 1947
Anna E.	Born July 30, 1871	Died Aug. 6, 1871
Florence R.	Born Sept. 4, 1872	Died Jan. 19, 1961
James H.	Born Oct. 7, 1874	Died Nov. 1, 1958
Ida L.	Born Oct. 9, 1876	Died Feb. 11, 1956
Melvin	Born Oct. 26, 1878	Died Mar. 7, 1895
Edwin	Born Apr. 7, 1880	Died Jan. 6, 1935
Charles Lewis	Born June 19, 1885	Died May 28, 1973
Earl	Born June 18, 1888	Died Sept. 10, 1888

*Submitted by Rebecca Wolfe Woodward
great granddaughter of William Charles Ritter
my grandmother was Ida L. she married
Charles Wolfe they were my grandparents*

WILLIAM CHARLES RITTER
(1843-1912)

by
Charles Lewis Ritter
(1961)

Being a boy I was, of course, always interested in what my father had to tell about his Civil War experiences.

And since he had enlisted with the 21st Ohio volunteer infantry as did many boys at that time, to get into the army, and since the 21st Ohio was a fighting regiment with an enviable record by the end of the war, I, like many other boys in and around Findlay, Ohio, whose fathers had fought with the 21st Ohio, grew up on first-hand stories of the great battles of Stone's River (or Murfreesboro) and Chickamauga, of prison life and prison escapes, and of the drive to Atlanta and of Sherman's march to the sea.

I knew about how the 21st Ohio, having earlier been detached from its brigade to defend another place in the line, had remained on the field with General Thomas at Chickamauga when disaster came and the Union center and right were swept from the field. I knew of how the 21st Ohio had helped General Thomas ("The Rock of Chickamauga") hold fast on the left against the massive enemy thrusts that attempted to dislodge him--hold fast until nightfall. I knew of how the 21st Ohio, there on Horseshoe Ridge with darkness coming on, was among the last regiments to fire a shot and to leave the line on that fateful day.

And of course I knew of how, in the growing darkness (intensified by the lingering smoke of battle and of burning grass and leaves), the 21st Ohio and a couple other regiments were surrounded by a large force of enemy, and of how part of the 21st Ohio broke through and escaped while the remainder--and larger part--of the regiment was captured.

On that night, September 20, 1863, after two days of bloody fighting, with many men from the regiment left dead and wounded on the field, the 21st Ohio became, as it were, a two-part regiment: the small part which escaped capture and fell back with Thomas to go through the siege of Chattanooga, and the larger part which was marched away to enemy prisons.

My father was among those who were captured. Along with others, he was moved to Virginia and placed in prison at Danville. I've often heard him tell of the miseries he and his companions experienced during his stay in prison, particularly of the food on which they had to exist--mainly bug--infested beans. I've heard him tell how at times they were so hungry that they were only too glad to have the bugs to eat along with the beans.

So it was that at the time a part of the 21st Ohio, copped up and on scant rations back at Chattanooga, was stealing food from the mules, another part of the 21st Ohio, away in enemy prisons, was also half-starved and was only too ready to eat their beans, however buggy the beans.

After spending a period at the Danville prison, my father, along with other prisoners, was started for the prison at Andersonville, Georgia. On the way, my father and two others of a boxcar full of prisoners made their escape. Having a small knife concealed in their clothing when they began

the trip, the men proceeded to cut a hole in the bottom of the car. The escape, as reported in a newspaper account many years later, reads as follows:

"When the train stopped at a station for water, Mr. Ritter, Mr. Kimmel, now of Cleveland, and Mr. McGee, who lives in Colorado, dropped through the hole which had been made in the bottom of the car and escaped."

"There was scarcely any ballast on the track, leaving much empty space between the ties. Each man lay flat between the ties until the train whistled and moved away from above them. Then they got up and made their way to the woods which were near by, making good their escape. It was nearly a month later when they finally reached the Union lines in Tennessee."

"From the time they escaped from the boxcar until they arrived within the Union lines, they traveled almost wholly by night, sleeping during the day. At times they were so near the Confederate army that they could hear their conversation. During the latter part of their journey they were piloted by a southern young woman, who favored the Union."

"When they approached the Union camp they sent the young woman ahead to tell the Union soldiers who they were. At first the soldiers were distrustful, but finally they were convinced that they were Union soldiers and welcomed them to their camp."

My father entered the war, being absent from his home for three years and 21 days.

At this writing, 1961, I the youngest of these children am the only one still living.

WILLIAM RITTER
1804-1864

William Ritter was born in Germany in 1804. Very little is known of his early life in that country or who his parents were. We know that he was married in Germany and lost his first wife at sea coming to America after only 2 years of marriage. William was to know heart break and was to begin his new life in America alone.

It is not known where he landed or what year. It is known that he married Ann his second wife at Minerva, Stark county, Ohio in 1839 or before. Her maiden name is unknown.

A daughter Rebecca was born in Feb. 9, 1840 and William Charles in Feb. 18, 1843. In 1846 they moved to Shawtown in Hancock county, Ohio. Shawtown is just west and north of the present town of McComb, Ohio.

It is known that he entered the country before 1839 and records show that less than 1 million immigrants entered the country between 1790 and 1840. He was one of the first to discover the "new land of opportunity" and the "land of second chance."

At Shawtown he soon had a tailor shop open and it is believed the tailor trade was brought from Germany. He soon left Shawtown and moved to McComb. His tailor shop was located on the corner just east of the bank on main street. Rather he worked at any other trades are unknown.

When his son William enlisted in the Union Army on Aug. 23, 1861, he listed his occupation as farmer. William Charles was away in the Union Army and was held prisoner by the confederates. He was discharged on Sept. 23, 1864 in Atlanta, Ga. Rather he was able to return in time to see his father or mother who both died in 1864 is unknown.

Both William & Ann are buried on the hill of the South section of McComb's cemetery.