



The Oakland Gazette

Fall 1998, Vol. 31, No. 2

Published by OAKLAND COUNTY PIONEER & HISTORICAL SOCIETY / 405 OAKLAND AVENUE, PONTIAC, MICHIGAN 48342

Society Library Move Done Ahead of Schedule



An ambitious plan to move the contents of the Society's venerable research library into prepared, newer surroundings was accomplished ahead of its target date, November 2, 1998. The shift to the carriage house at the rear of the historic site was

made on seven weekends in August, October and November. The space obtained was formerly used as a meeting room, gift shop, and craft activity area.

The speed of the move was attributed to the library committee's well thought-out procedure and the muscle power of the Oakland County sponsored WAM (Weekly Alternative Misdemeanor) program. The latter won high praise from Kathryn Daggy, Society president. "We couldn't have done it without them. They boxed, moved, and unboxed all sorts of fragile library materials flawlessly. They washed, scrubbed, and painted whatever we asked and still had time to work on our grounds, raking some four acres of leaves." Board member, Ellen Zehnder, recommended the WAM worker program to the Society and introduced its supervisors to the library committee.

Mary Wessels, Society librarian, noted that on October 19th in the midst of the move, Hank Schaller, a reporter for *The Oakland Press*, ventured on the scene to research a story on the City of Pontiac's history. "We were delighted to have been able to assist him under such hectic conditions," Wessels said. "He has the distinction of being our first patron at the new location." Schaller's article subsequently appeared in a special *Press* section, "A Closer Look: Pontiac," on November 22nd.

The library's Phase Two plan involves an addition, some twenty by forty feet, being made to the rear or west side of the carriage house. Society board members, Gil Haven and Bruce Annett, are working on the projected plans with Mike Willis, vice president. The addition's basic design has been approved by the Society's board of directors at its November 18th meeting.

Society to Hold Annual Meeting

The Society will host its 125th Annual Meeting on January 20, 1999 at the Oakland Avenue Evangelical Presbyterian Church, 404 Oakland Ave., in Pontiac. The meeting, which is open to all members, will begin at 1:00 p.m.

On the agenda will be the election of officers, the president's address, and the distribution of the 1998 annual report to its officers and board members.

The program will also include a slide presentation by George and Kay Meyer entitled, "American Folk Art Canes: Gestures of Communication that Poke into History." Mr. Meyer is a well-known author and prominent folk art collector who has pioneered the study of canes and walking sticks as artifacts rich in artistic, cultural, and historical traditions. His wife, Kay, is associate editor of *American Folk Art Canes: Personal Sculpture*, and *Folk Artists Biographical Index*. A number of more unusual and richly carved specimens from their collection will be on view for the audience.

Light refreshments will be served at the conclusion of the meeting. For more information contact Renee or Charlie at the office, Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Walking sticks and canes, as American as Fred Astair, will be featured at Society's Annual Meeting.



Welcome New Members!

- Patricia Fisher White Lake
- Doris Smith Pontiac
- Phyllis June Forrest Pontiac
- Clayton J. Jones, Sr. Keego Harbor
- Dr. Richard Stamps Oakland University
- Shirley McDonnell Waterford
- June Burgess Clarkston
- Loma Tippin Clarkston
- James Gibson Bloomfield Hills
- Paul Tangora Oxford
- Scott Hudson Waterford
- Jim Thompson Auburn Hills
- Buzz Brown (Patron) Keego Harbor

THEY'RE BAAACK!!!

Just when you thought it was safe to roam the old Wisner grounds... well, be forewarned Pine Grove Pete and mate Prunella have returned.

After a four year hiatus our toothy woodchucks have been observed sitting on their haunches, snacking on the largess of a crab apple tree south of the office. They have settled in comfortably and appear to coexist well with their distant cousins, the squirrels, who have devoted their energies to harvesting this year's abundant acorn crop. "Farm cat," a large white feline who stalks the west half of the property, has kept her distance, treating the chucks with an air of disdain. Little does cat know that the Latin name of those bold invaders is *Marmota monax* or "mountain rat."

Now with the approach of cold weather a den for the chucks has been discovered beneath the mansion's colonnaded porch. Here hibernation begins in late October or early November and continues until next March. As previously mentioned such dens are connected to a tunnel network sometimes up to 45 feet in length (Fall/Winter issue, 1994). Their nesting chamber is frequently lined with leaves or grasses for their deep winter sleep.

One male Society member who admired Prunella with binoculars in September reported she bore a striking resemblance to Ally McBeal in a large fur coat. Such a comparison with a TV star is weird at best. By the same token if you think Pine Grove Prunella is an unusual name for a woodchuck, consider Calista Flockhart!



Caught with a telephoto lens!

The Lustre of it all!

Above right are three examples of lustre decorated ceramic. The sugar bowl (center) and a cup with accompanying saucer (right) bear a floral motif accented with pink lustre leaves and distinctive broad bands. They are part of an eighteen-piece porcelain set donated to the Society by Stuart Packard of



Waterford, Michigan. Mr. Packard said the collection was formerly owned by Henry and Mary (Robinson) Waldron. A Henry Waldron was president of this Society (1876-1878), in effect serving during the nation's centennial. The third example (left) is a miniature pitcher sporting copper lustre which was once owned by an ancestor of Gaylor Forman (Pickering side of the family). The metallic type of lustre, shown on the three forms, is specifically an English invention, credited to John Hancock (1758-1847) of Hanley.

Word About the Supplement

The article that accompanies this issue tells the story of a nineteenth-century woman caught in a frightening, humiliating dilemma. The solution she chose was outside the accepted sexual perimeters of her time. It must be remembered that in the last century men generally dominated society with women often treated as little more than subservient chattels to gratify their husbands every whim or desire.

During the tumult of our Civil War significant strides to break free of that mold were made by women, generally in the areas of education, nursing, or journalism. It is said some four hundred of that gender served either North or South, mostly in hospitals or near the front. Sarah Emma Edmonds Seelye alias "Franklin Thompson" was one of the few that disguised her sex, donned Northern blue, and went into battle.

Today, some would label her a transvestite with an "attitude," or one who temporarily deserted her sisters and perhaps slept with the enemy. One hundred years ago Freud would have delightfully dissected her id and found a fertile field for his theories. We hope that behind her many scars and masks you find find a genuine American hero, as worthy of that title as any man.

The Editor

Rusty Relic Bushwacks Mower

While cutting Pine Grove's four acre lawn, member Gale Scafe always keeps watch for dangerous obstructions. But this past September 19 even his vigilance could not detect a hazard half buried behind the old smokehouse, waiting to attack his riding mower. "When I hit it there was a loud bang, sparks, and a cloud of smoke," Scafe recalled.

What first appeared as an iron pipe proved to be the rusty barrel and breech to a turn-of-the-century rifle. There was no trace of its wooden parts, the fore and shoulder stocks had completely decayed away over time.

Mike Martinez, NRA member knowledgeable in antique arms, inspected the weapon and identified it as a .22 caliber single shot rifle most likely made by the firm of Joshua Stevens of Chicopee Falls, Mass. "These were low priced articles," Martinez said, "destined for a market of young wanabee hunters." Such tradenames as "Little Scout, Crack Shot, and Sure Shot" targeted this youthful audience. Hundreds of thousands of these rifles were sold during the first four decades of this century, he noted.

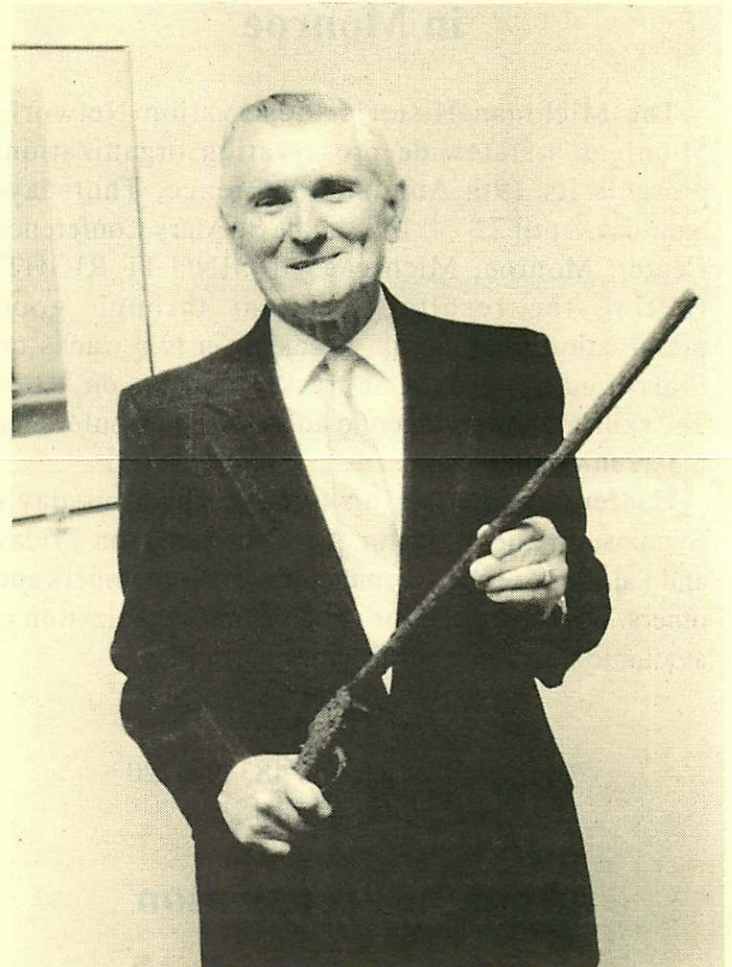
An examination of the rifle revealed an opening, one-quarter inch in diameter on the underside of the breech. Martinez explained that this was the site of a screw that if loosened would help separate the barrel from the frame for ease of cleaning or transport. Rust now holds these parts together but such a takedown feature appears on several Stevens' single shot models, Martinez said. The most popular model was appropriately called the "Favorite," which according to old catalogues could be purchased for six to eight dollars at the time. Today, the "Favorite" in very good condition might command a price of \$150 to \$450, but the Pine Grove example has no monetary value due to its corroded state and missing parts, he added.

Joshua Stevens (1814-1907) founded his company in 1864 at Chicopee Falls after a lengthy career working for other notable gun manufacturers. Among them was the celebrated Eli Whitney, famous for his cotton gin and Whitney-Walker Colt revolvers. Over the years Stevens would be granted a half-dozen patents, most of them refinements of then current production models. However, his creation of a tip-up barrel for a revolver won him the recognition that led

to the formation of his own business on September 6, 1864. The firm grew slowly and it wasn't until Stevens actually sold out his interest in 1896 that major growth occurred. By 1915 the Stevens Company was recognized as a leading manufacturer of target and small game hunting guns. Savage Arms Company purchased the old firm in its entirety in 1920 and made Stevens a subsidiary operation. Forty years later the Chicopee plant where Stevens built his industry reputation was abandoned when Savage moved its operations to Westfield, Massachusetts.

Society administrator Charlie Martinez contacted Vernon Kath, son of the last Pine Grove caretaker employed by the Wisners, for information about the find. Kath said no one in his family had such a weapon, leaving the Society with a mystery as to the identity of its owner.

Aside from a nicked blade, Scafe said the mower would be in fighting trim for service next spring.



Board Member, Gale Scafe, proudly displays trophy weapon. Its subsurface location near smokehouse suggests a dump site nearby.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: Historical Society to Host Grant Assistance Workshop

The Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs along with the Michigan Association of Community Arts Agencies and the Accounting Aid Society will be holding its annual Grant Assistance Workshop in the Society's one-room schoolhouse on the grounds of Pine Grove on March 18, 1999 from 10:00 A.M. until 2:30 P.M.

The Society encourages its interested members to contact Renee or Charlie if they wish to attend this free event. Seating will be obviously limited for this popular workshop.

Historic Preservation Conference Scheduled for April 1999 in Monroe

The Michigan Historic Preservation Network, Michigan's statewide preservation organization, presents its 19th Annual Conference, Thursday-Saturday, April 22-24, 1999 at the St. Mary Conference Center, Monroe, Michigan. "DOING IT RIGHT: Getting the results you want through good preservation, features 45 speakers in two tracks on Friday and Saturday. One track will focus on "How To" skills, while the second addresses the conference theme in-depth.

Conference fees go up to \$125 for Thursday's Symposium and \$155 for the Conference on Friday and Saturday, with discounts for MHPN members and others. Display space for vendors and organization is available. For more information write:

MHPN
P.O. Box #720
Clarkston, Michigan 48347-0720
Fax (248) 625-8181

Book in Preparation

Research on *Dead Reckoning: Compendium of Oakland County Cemeteries* has resumed after a year's hiatus. Gaylor Forman and Charlie Martinez are

pouring over old plat maps and municipal records in an effort to document cemeteries, extant or abandoned, around the county. Data such as exact location, size in terms of acres or fractions thereof, ownership, unusual monuments, prominent decedents, and the like will be included. Photos and maps will balance the text. A brief history of the American cemetery movement as exhibited in the county will also be included. Publication is anticipated for the end of 1999 or beginning of 2000.

Staff

Reneé Greer Alvarez and Charles H. Martinez
(Co-administrators)
Office Phone: 1-(248)-338-6732
Fax: # (248)-338-6731

Hours of Operation

Office Monday-Friday / 9AM - 4PM
Library Thursday-Friday / 9AM - 3PM
Tours By appointment only

Officers

President Kathryn Daggy
1st V.P. Mike Willis
2nd V.P. Clarke Kimball
Secretary Irma McMillen
Treasurer Dan Carmichael
Resident Agent Ed Adler

Editorial Staff

Editor Charles H. Martinez
Associate Editor Ross Callaway

Sarah Emma Edmonds – Mistress of Deception

by Charles H. Martinez

A female rebel may put on as many airs as she pleases, but we take the responsibility of telling her she is "no gentleman."

Pontiac Weekly Gazette,
"Miscellaneous Items" October 10, 1862

When a shy, slender youth knocked on the door of an Oakland County farmhouse in 1860, the residents little imagined their hospitality would snare them in their visitor's net of deception, thereby securing for the family a place in the history of the American Civil War.

The farmer was Charles Pratt who owned a pair of eighty acre parcels in Rose Township. One laid in the southwest quarter of section 21 and the other diagonally across what is today known as Demode Road in the northwest quarter of section 28. The farmhouse stood on that latter parcel which Pratt had purchased on December 28, 1853.^①

Living on the property with Charles in 1860 were his wife, Keziah; their four daughters; Keziah's mother, Mary Crane; and two farmhands. Missing from the enumerator's count for that census year was the Pratt's youngest child and only son, C.C., who was born January 9, 1857.

Over a decade before Pratt acquired the property, the first surveyors of Rose Township described the land here as rolling terrain which supported scattered stands of white and yellow oak. Both parcels were traversed by tributaries to nearby Buckhorn Lake and dotted with small ponds that characterized the region.^②

Pratt was not the most successful farmer in Oakland County in 1860, but he did the best with what he had. The year before his one hundred "improved acres" had yielded one hundred and fifty bushels of wheat, sixty bushels of rye, one hundred bushels of Indian corn, and fifty tons of hay. His flock of seventy sheep produced three hundred and thirty pounds of wool.^③ As a result the young hired hands, George Allen and Charles Hubble, always had plenty of chores to keep them busy under the watchful eye of farmer Pratt.

Rose Township's population on the eve of the Civil War was only 1,160 persons, a thin veneer spread over some thirty-six square miles. In such isolation it is not surprising that the greeting extended a stranger was one of guarded cordiality. The young lad, standing on Pratt's front porch that chilly autumn day, seemed innocent enough. In fact he claimed to be a bible salesman. He smiled a broad smile from an equally broad jaw, looked farmer Pratt in the eye and said in a soft voice, "My name is Franklin Thompson, but my friends call me Frank."

This was a bare-faced lie, one of thousands that tumbled without

hesitation from the lips of the brown-eyed, curly-haired youth, whose real name was Sarah Emma Edmonds.^④ Much of Edmonds' personal life remains an enigma but her service as Union soldier, nurse, dispatch rider, and alleged spy constitute one of the most remarkable stories in the annals of U.S. military history.

Sarah was born in the Parish of Prince William, York County, New Brunswick, Canada in 1839.^⑤ Her mother, Elizabeth, was a kindly woman of Irish ancestry. Her father, Isaac, a Scotch-Irish immigrant farmer, was a strict disciplinarian and hard taskmaster who kept all his children regardless of age or sex working long, grueling hours in the fields.



Engraving of Sarah Emma Edmonds from her autobiography *Nurse and Spy*.

Like the Pratt's, the Edmonds' family had an overabundance of female offspring. There was Frances, Mary Jane, Rebecca Sarah, and Sarah Emma. The couple's only son, Thomas, was an epileptic, a condition that in his father's eyes rendered him useless for farm work. Whereas Charles Pratt could afford hired hands, Isaac Edmonds could not and so took out his frustration on his wife and children. Although never specifically mentioned there were hints of physical abuse by the father. The possibility of sexual abuse cannot be ruled out either.

One day when Sarah was about thirteen an old peddler stopped

at the farm. In return for supper and lodging he left behind a book entitled *Fanny Campbell: or, The Female Pirate Captain, A Tale of the Revolution!* by M.M. Bailou (1844). Sarah eagerly read the story and identified with the tomboy heroine. She imagined herself escaping farm drudgery and a domineering father by adopting some impenetrable disguise and running off.

A few years later when her father insisted she marry an older man for whom she had nothing but contempt, Sarah put her plan into action. With the help of a friend who was visiting her mother, she fled by stage to a neighboring town where she learned the millinery trade. Still afraid her father might discover her whereabouts Sarah left for the U.S., having seen an advertisement placed by a publishing house for door-to-door salesmen. Dressed as a man and identifying herself as "Franklin Thompson" she won the job by virtue of her clean-cut appearance, glib tongue, and "honest" smile. Her employer, Hulburt and Company, of Hartford, CT. sent her on the road selling bibles throughout its territory in Nova Scotia. Over time she convinced many a Christian family that their faith would be greatly strengthened with the purchase of a beautifully bound, gilt-edged, unabridged copy of the Old Testament. Indeed, Frank Thompson was a natural salesperson from the git-go.

Eventually Sarah was asked to market the Hulburt line in Michigan. Her appearance in Oakland County was recalled by one of Charles Pratt's daughters, Lora L., on the occasion of the Rose Township Centennial celebration in 1935. By this time Lora had married a neighbor, Pardon Doty, and had a family of her own. In a newspaper interview Lora Doty said:

The girl, disguised in men's clothing came to my father's house selling Bibles and other religious books when I was a small child. She asked to make her home with us while carrying on her sales work, and frequently assisted with the chores.

She used the name of Franklin Thompson. Her features were almost too coarse to be those of a woman and too fine for a man. Once when she was helping my father he remarked that she handled a pitchfork like a woman. She dispelled his suspicions with the explanation that she had never done farm work.

She was extremely devout. We had another boarder at our home, Elder Berry, who served as schoolteacher and Baptist minister. The two became great friends and corresponded throughout the war. It was through Elder Berry and his father that we finally learned the truth about our guest.^⑥

Lora Doty continued the interview by saying with the outbreak of the Civil War, Franklin Thompson announced his intention of enlisting in the Union Army and left their farm. At this point early in 1861 and possibly unknown to or not recalled by Lora and her family, Sarah went to Flint where she had already made numerous contacts with its residents through her bible sales. She developed a strong friendship with the Rev. Thomas Jefferson Joslin, pastor of the Methodist Episcopal Church there. He, in turn, introduced her to Damon Stewart and William R. Morse of the Flint Union Greys, a local militia unit. Another member, Lyman E. Stowe, recalled that Sarah "was known in Flint as Frank Thompson, the book canvasser."^⑦ Some biographers also believe Frank

maintained an active social life while in town, escorting young ladies to parties and squiring them on buggy rides!^⑧

At this critical juncture in her life, the Civil War commenced. Sarah must have given considerable thought to what course of action she would pursue in the event of conflict. As a Canadian citizen she was not obliged to serve. One of her biographers believes she was emboldened by the success of her disguise and sought to prolong the thrill of the masquerade by joining the colors.^⑨ Sarah, a few years later, gives a little different spin to her motivation.

I am naturally fond of adventure, a little ambitious and a good deal romantic, and this together with my devotion to the Federal cause and determination to assist to the utmost of my ability in crushing the rebellion, made me forget the unpleasant items and not only endure, but really enjoy, the privations connected with my perilous positions. Perhaps a spirit of adventure was important, but patriotism was the grand secret of my success.^⑩

On May 17, 1861 Sarah using the name "Franklin Thompson" enlisted as a private in company F, Second Michigan Volunteer Infantry at Flint. Eight days later Thompson was officially mustered into the unit at Detroit. Early in the war there was no physical examination of enlistees. The recruiters were generally looking for warm bodies sound of wind and limb. Sarah later recalled the examiner staring at the palm of her hand and asking, "...what sort of living has this hand earned?" Her reply: "Well, up to the present that hand has been chiefly engaged in getting an education." Her education was about to be sorely tested.

Although some of her company remembered "Frank" as small and delicate, Sarah was able to complete basic training with its accent on drilling, marksmanship, and knowledge of commands without incident. However, her size and demeanor suggested to her superiors that this soldier could best serve as a hospital nurse. Sarah may have even requested such duty. Dr. Alonzo B. Palmer of Ann Arbor, a military surgeon, assigned her the status of visiting nurse rotating among the many temporary military hospitals in Washington, D.C.

Like hundreds of other nurses, both male and female, Sarah had no prior medical training. She was expected in the absence of doctors to use common sense or the manual, *Nurses in the Army Hospitals*, published in 1861. Fortunately for her patients Private "Thompson" had the gift of healing which she believed was inherited from her "saintly" Irish mother. Sarah once described her special nursing skill this way, "... when not too weary or exhausted, there was a magnetic power in my hands to soothe the delirium."^⑪

Following the First and Second Battle of Bull Run, Private Thompson helped nurse the wounded. Shortly thereafter, her skill as a horseback rider was apparently recognized and she began carrying the mail and serving as a dispatch rider. During the course of these assignments Sarah's strength showed a marked decline. She began to manifest symptoms of malaria and later claimed serious injuries in a fall from a mule. By the spring of 1863 the deterioration of her physical and mental health had reached such a stage that she was forced to seek a furlough. When this was denied and faced with the inevitable discovery of her sex if

hospitalized, Private Thompson deserted the Union Army in mid-April at Lebanon, Kentucky.

The young soldier, fearing apprehension, travelled quickly to Oberlin, Ohio, where a few days rest was obtained. Next a journey was made to Pittsburgh. There, women's clothing was purchased and the formal and final change was made back to "Sarah Emma Edmonds".

Upon return to Oberlin she began writing her autobiography *Nurse and Spy*. She took the manuscript to her old friends at Hulbert and Company who agreed to publish it. The work became an instant best-seller, some 175,000 copies were purchased. Ignoring the wealth and fame offered, Sarah turned her royalties over to the Christian Sanitary Commission and sought a civilian role as a nurse for the remainder of the war.

A critical review of *Nurse and Spy* finds it mostly a romantic novel seasoned with certain dashes of truth. It reads like a mixture of "The Perils of Pauline" and "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty." Details of battles; participating commanders; descriptions of the ironclads, Monitor and Merrimac; even the use of an observation balloon; all have the ring of truth and might have been copied from newspaper articles of the day. In contrast is her alleged service as an undercover agent for the Union Army who, according to her publisher, penetrates enemy lines "no less than eleven times; always with complete success and without detection." When asked if her book was authentic, she answered, "Not strictly so. Still most of the experiences there recorded were either my own or came under my own observation."¹² Ironically, with her talent for deception, her espionage and counterespionage activities so detailed in *Nurse and Spy* have never been acknowledged by our government. In a sworn statement made in later life, Sarah disavowed this part of her military career. "I make no statement of any secret services. In my mind there is almost as much odium attached to the word 'spy' as there is to the word 'deserter.'"

Of even more interest to historians than the cloak and dagger aspect of her career, is the "real" reason for Private Thompson's departure from the Union Army. While there were always doubts as to how Sarah could mask her sexual identity for more than two years in service, the first serious challenge occurred in 1963 following the acquisition of the Jerome John Robbins' diary by the Michigan Historical Collections at the University of Michigan.¹³ Robbins was a member of the Second Michigan Volunteer Infantry and shared hospital duties with Private Thompson. Over a period

of time it would appear Sarah had fallen in love, first with Robbins and later with Assistant Adjutant General James Reid of the Seventy-ninth New York Volunteers. The latter affair was corroborated by another soldier, William Boston, First Corporal in the Twentieth Michigan. Boston wrote in his diary on April 22, 1863:

We are having quite a time at the expense of our brigade postmaster. He turns out to be a girl, and has deserted when his lover, Inspector Read [sic] and General Poe resigned.¹⁴

The General Poe referred to is the highly respected Orlando M. Poe who had been commissioned Colonel of the Second on September 16, 1861 when Isreal Bush Richardson was appointed Brigadier General. Poe did several favors for Private Thompson, for example making "him" brigade postmaster and mail carrier on December 5, 1862. A week later when Poe's orderly became ill, Private Thompson volunteered to take his place and so served during the Battle of Fredericksburg. After the war Poe cavalierly referred to his "faithful" servant with the



Mirror Image: Sarah as Pvt. Thompson encounters dying transvestite after Battle of Antietam; one of several strange incidents in *Nurse and Spy*.

statement, "As a soldier 'Frank Thompson' was effeminate looking and for this reason was detailed as mail carrier to avoid taking an efficient soldier from the ranks."¹⁵ No aspersions were cast on this officer's career because of his association with Private Thompson, and Poe would go on to serve with distinction as General Sherman's chief engineer on that Union leader's famous march to the sea. In fact, because of his engineering expertise, Poe's name has been memorialized on a Sault lock in the Upper Peninsula.

At least three other soldiers probably knew Private Thompson's secret before any rumors spread. One was Richard Halsted who cared for Sarah when she was injured and maintained a lifelong friendship with his buddy. Halsted wrote a postwar affidavit attesting to her suffering, and at the urging of modest Sarah added the key phrase, "but I never knew that she was a woman."¹⁶

After the close of the Civil War Sarah married Linus H. Seely, a

widower from her part of New Brunswick, Canada. It's not surprising that Sarah who had a passion for changing names made her new husband add an "e" to the end of his. The couple were to have three children, all of whom died quite young. They adopted two sons, both lived to adulthood, one of whom served in the Spanish-American War.



Sarah Emma Thompson as "Franklin Thompson."
(Courtesy of State Archives of Michigan.)

In the 1880s Sarah began a quest for a military pension as the threat of poverty loomed and her health continued to steadily decline. This necessitated contacting her fellow veterans of the Second Michigan, most of whom would learn of her true identity for the first time. In 1884, after much red tape, Sarah Emma Edmonds Seelye and Franklin Thompson were

recognized as the same person, and a pension at the rate of \$12 per month was granted. The same year she attended a Regimental Association Reunion in Flint, Michigan. Gossip by veterans' wives marred the occasion for her. She wrote her old comrade, Halsted,

on January 27, 1885, "... God forgive me for going." Two and a half years later President Grover Cleveland signed a bill that removed the stigma of desertion from her record. However, bounty and back pay only totalled some one hundred dollars, another major disappointment for Mrs. Seelye.

Sarah evidently never saw the Pratt family of Rose Township again, although she revisited Michigan on at least three occasions after the Civil War. Some historians have wondered if Sarah ever returned to set the record straight with any of those farm families with whom she stayed as "Franklin Thompson" during her bible selling days. The question remains unanswered.

During the last decade of her life, now spent at LaPorte, Texas, rumors circulated that Sarah was working on a tell-all sequel to *Nurse and Spy*. Her final honor came in April of 1897 with her induction into the George B. McClelland Post, No. 9, of the Grand Army of the Republic in Houston, Texas. This tribute was most appreciated because it recognized her as the only woman member of that famous Civil War veterans' organization.

Sarah died quietly and alone on September 5, 1898 from infirmities caused by her military service. Only her old German Shepherd, Jack, marked her passing with a howling salute. A weathered tombstone in Washington Cemetery, Houston, reads "Emma E. Seelye, Army Nurse." The alleged tell-all manuscript was never found among her belongings. Its existence was just another secret she took to her grave.

*She was mail carrier & came on one of her trips with
the mail badly hurt & was not able to get around much
for several days she (or he as then known) was my
bunk mate considerable of the time. She was so*

[Here state the time and place and manner in which the wound or other injury was received. Describe the wound or injury, the part of the body wounded or injured, and all the circumstances attending it. If sickness, state time and place when contracted, what caused it, the name of the sickness, and how it affected him.]

Sarah's "bunk mate," Sergeant Richard Halsted, swore in an 1897 affidavit that... I never knew that she was a woman." (Courtesy of the National Archives.)

NOTES

- Rose Township Deeds Book, Sections 22-29, p. 106(1). Oakland County Register of Deeds, Oakland County Courthouse, Pontiac, Michigan.
- Bela Hubbard, "Michigan Maps - Oakland County," Rose Township [1839-1840]. Machine copies held by the O.C.P. & H.S.
- United States Federal Census, 1860, Schedule 4 Productions of Agriculture Rose Township, Oakland County Michigan. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives & Records Service, 1973) 45. Microfilm available at the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, Detroit, Michigan.
- Her father's surname was first recorded as "Edmonson" and later changed to "Edmondson." The shortened version, "Edmonds," was probably introduced by Sarah herself. cf. Richard Hall, *Patriots in Disguise: Women Warriors of the Civil War* (New York: Paragon House, 1993), 74.
- Betty Fladeland, "Alias Franklin Thompson," *Michigan History* 42 (December 1958): 435. Other authors give Sarah's birth year as 1841 or 1842. cf. Hall, 74; Patricia L. Faust, ed. *Historical Times Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Civil War* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 236. To further confuse the issue Sarah on December 30, 1891 claimed to be 56 years old, making her birth year 1835! cf. Declaration for the Increase of an Invalid Pension, "S. Emma E. Seelye alias Frank Thompson." National Archives. The weight of evidence still suggests 1839, however.
- Detroit Free Press* 6 October 1935.
- Flint Daily Journal* (?) May 1914.
- Sylvia G.L. Dannett, *She Rode With The Generals* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1960), 44.
- Ibid.*, 49-50.
- Emma E. Edmonds Mrs. Linus H. Seelye, *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army: Comprising the Adventures and Experiences of a Woman in Hospitals, Camps, and Battlefields*, (Hartford: W.S. Williams & Co., 1865), 121.
- House of Representatives Report No. 820. "Franklin Thompson, Alias S.E.E. Seelye," 1. National Archives.
- Hall, 84.
- Betty Fladeland, "New Light on Sarah Emma Edmonds Alias Franklin Thompson," *Michigan History* 47 (December 1963): 357-8.
- Ibid.*, 361.
- Dannett, 211.
- Proof of Origin of Disability. "Case of S. Emma E. Seeley [sic]" Affidavit made by Richard Halsted, 13 Sept. 1897. National Archives.

The Oakland County Pioneer & Historical Society
would like to announce its

“125th ANNUAL MEETING”

January 20, 1999

at Oakland Avenue Evangelical Presbyterian Church
404 Oakland Avenue, Pontiac, Michigan

AGENDA

1:00 p.m. Distribution of 1998 Annual Committee Reports
Remarks by Mike Willis, Vice President
Benediction by Robert Reynells

1:15 p.m. President’s Report
Kathryn Daggy, President

Election of Officers
Susan Metzdorf, Nomination Committee Chair

PROGRAM

*“American Folk Art Canes:
Gestures of Communication That Poke Into History”*

A presentation by
George and Kay Meyer, celebrated authors, lecturers, and
folk art collectors

Light refreshments will be served at the conclusion of the
meeting.

ALL SOCIETY MEMBERS ARE WELCOME!!!