

SATURDAY, MAY 8, 2010

The Forsyth Saga - Newton Style

My late dad told a family story on July 4, 1976, at a family gather celebrating the USA's bicentennial:

On the Belanger side of the family, great-grandmother's brother fought in the Civil War on the Union side. During his tour of duty he took a little "vacation" and came home to the family farm, near Green Bay, Wisconsin. He stayed on the farm getting "fatted up" and then went back to the fighting.

I wrote about this story in my diary all those years ago, and wondered back then whether it could be true, and marveling at the fact that I might actually have an ancestor who fought in the Civil War.

Now I've been developing the Newton/Jablonski family tree. I did not remember that particular old story, but pulled out my old diary because I knew I had asked my mom and dad questions about the family background that day so many years ago. The bits and pieces of information it contained from that day were very helpful in getting started on my family research.

My great-great grandmother, Mathilda Forsyth (1861-1943), married Edward Belanger, Jr. (b. 1855) They were the parents of Ida Belanger (1893-1962) and other children.

Ida Belanger was my grandmother. She married Frank C. Newton (1894-1964). They were the parents of my father, Francis John Newton (1922-2002), and other children.

I discovered that Mathilda Forsyth was one of several children of Jerome B. Forsyth (1822-1905) and Theotiste Matilda Brunette (1824-1904) who lived on a farm in Preble, Brown County, Wisconsin. Jerome B. and Theotiste married in 1841.

Jerome B. was the son of Andrew Forsyth, b. 1795 in Longford, Ireland, and Susan Augarnel, b. about 1781 in the Netherlands or Belgium. Andrew and Susan married in Belgium in 1816. I do not have Andrew's service record as a member of the British Army, but I figure he must have fought in the Napoleonic Wars and perhaps he even fought at Waterloo. And yes, it is not an error in Susan's birthdate. She was 14 years older than her husband. He was 21 at the time of their marriage; Susan was 35.

In later years on United States census records, Andrew Forsyth - I call him Andrew the Soldier - listed his profession as soldier - with good reason. After the marriage, Andrew was posted to Quebec, Canada. It was there that their first son - Andrew - was born in 1818. In the baptismal record, Andrew the Soldier is listed as a Colonel-___ something -- I did not recognize the abbreviation or title -- in the 37th Regiment, and Susan was listed as the mother.

I could not find a birth record for Jerome B. but I know he was Andrew the Soldier and Susan's son because they lived with him long enough to show up as part of his and Theotiste's household on the 1850 and 1860 U.S. Censuses. Andrew, the elder son, and his smaller family, were nearby, as Andrew the Soldier had purchased 160 acres of pristine Wisconsin land in 1837, for which he paid cash.

Both Andrew and his younger brother Jerome B. were "musicians" in the U.S. Army in the 1830s, when they were only kids! After getting over my shock at such young kids being in the military, I realized - duh - that children have been part of the military for thousands of years. They were drummers; they were flag-bearers; they played the pipes and horns. In the United States, being enrolled as a musician in a military company or local militia was a badge of honor hotly coveted for amongst young boys.

Given his military background, I figure Andrew the Soldier got his sons involved in the military at an early age, and got them paying positions as musicians. They would have earned on average, about \$8 USD a month. At some point, Andrew the Soldier mustered out of the British Army and moved to the United States, but I am not aware that he served any time with the United States armed forces or any state militia. On U.S. census records, in his later years Jerome B. indicated that he had been born in Vermont. I believe him, because if he had been born in Canada, particularly in French Quebec with their meticulous record-keeping, I would have found evidence of his birth there. In contrast, the states in the USA kept rather crappy records of births, marriages, and deaths.

Son Andrew served one five year stint as a "musician" 14 Apr 1832 to 14 Apr 1837 with Co. G, 5th Regiment, U.S. Infantry.

Son Jerome B. served a stint as a young musician 11 Feb 1833 to 11 Feb. 1838 in Co. G, 36th Regiment, U.S. Infantry. He did a second stint as a musician 15 Jun 1838 to 15 June 1841, with Co. R, 5th Regiment, U.S. Infantry.

Andrew the Soldier moved to Wisconsin with son Andrew in 1837. They settle on the 160 acres outside Green

Bay, Wisconsin and start farming. When Jerome B. finished his second Army stint, he also moved to Wisconsin.

Both sons married. Andrew married Anna (don't know her last name - her father was Irish and her mother was French) on 2 Aug 1840 in Brown County, Wisconsin. Jerome B. married Theotiste Matilda Brunette on 4 Feb. 1843 also in Brown County, Wisconsin.

Talk of civil war must have been in the air, along with talk of battles past by the menfolk of the Forsyth family before the fireplace late at night. Officially, the Civil War in the United States began on April 12, 1861, with the Confederacy's attack on Fort Sumter. Andrew the Soldier died at about age 66, on June 2, 1861. Andrew the Soldier lived long enough to see one grandson, Jerome Forsyth, the only son of Andrew and Anna, enlist on February 10, 1861 in Co. H, 12th Regiment Infantry, Wisconsin Volunteers. He was about 18 at the time.

Andrew III mustered in on 2 Oct 1861. He died of some kind of disease at Leavenworth, Kansas on March 30, 1862. I do not know if he saw any action or if he even made it out of camp. Young Jerome Forsyth listed his parents, Andrew and Anna, as the beneficiaries of his pension, which I believe was paid to them during their lifetimes. The grieving parents, who had lost their only son, comforted each other as best they could and lo and behold, a gift from the Goddess, a new son - Benjamin - was born in 1864.

Andrew the Soldier's younger son, Jerome B., left behind all of his responsibilities and a very large and young family and enlisted himself! The first enlistment was on October 11, 1862, mustered in November 10, 1862, mustered out February 27, 1864. This enlistment was I believe with Co. F&S (Field and Staff), 34th Reg. Infantry, Wisconsin Volunteers. Jerome B.'s son, George W. Forsyth, who was perhaps 15, enlisted in Wisconsin Co. G, 31st Reg. Infantry, Wisconsin Volunteers, on October 23, 1862. He mustered out on July 8, 1865.

During his first tour Jerome B. sustained a bullet wound to the left leg and was sent home. His first tour ended on February 27, 1864 and he immediately re-enlisted, this time in Co. G, 36th Reg. Infantry, Wisconsin Militia. His second tour began February 27, 1864 and ended not quite a year later, on February 1, 1865, during which he was promoted to "Primary Musician" which is like a General of the Company's band, a very important position.

So, Andrew the Soldier's son, Jerome B., and his grandson, George W., survived the Civil War; unfortunately, his grandson, Andrew, did not. What I do not know and have no way of confirming is whether it was great-grandmother Mathilda's brother, George W., who took unauthorized leave from the fighting - perhaps to accompany his wounded father home to the family farm in Wisconsin.

But I think that old family story is probably right.