

the SULTANA REMEMBERED

Newsletter of the Association of Sultana Descendants and Friends

April 27, 1865

FALL 1996

"I have had hard times but not as hard as Some....."

By Pam Newhouse

(Over the past few months I have received e-mail and letters regarding Sultana soldiers. Some are poignant, others matter-of-fact; all are important as we seek to remember these men. In this newsletter issue I will share these offerings with you. -Editor)

John Halliday of Pleasant Hill, California writes: "Throughout his term of service Samuel Poysell faithfully wrote home to his wife and three children (under the age of six), living in West Liberty, Ohio. He enrolled in Company E, 95th OVI on August 14 1862. A week after enlisting, and with very little training, the 95th was sent south. They didn't have long to wait before meeting the enemy, and on August 29-30, 1862, most of the regiment was captured at the Battle of Richmond, Kentucky. They were soon exchanged and after a period of reorganization, the regiment was again sent south. For the next two years, they participated in operations against Vicksburg, and went on numerous raids throughout Mississippi and Tennessee."

In early June, 1864, the regiment joined General Sturgis' expedition to Guntown, Mississippi. At the Battle of Brices Cross Roads, Mississippi, Poysell, along with many other members of his regiment, were captured. This group included Poysell's brother Will, and brother-in-law Elliott.

Sent to Andersonville, Georgia, a nine month gap appears in Poysell's letters home. His family didn't know whether he was alive or dead. In April 1865, he was released at Vicksburg. Soon after, he penned his last letter home before he was killed on the Sultana: (Note: Poysell used

no punctuation. It has been added for easier reading; however the spelling has been printed as he wrote it. Clarifying information in parentheses is John Halliday's).

"Parole Camp Vicksburg April 7, 1865

Dear Wife

I take my pen to write you a few lines to let you know that I am Still well and I hope when this Comes to hand you and Children will be enjoying the same blessing. the letter I wrote the other day was wrote in hast but Since then I have got things in better shape. I have drawn new close (clothes), a thing I was in great nead of as I was almost naked and dirty as nigger and as lousey as a dog. But have got to Gods Country whear every thing is plenty. the Sanitary & Christian Commission ar doing lots for us. they give us paper, ink & pens to write our friends and Potatoes & onions & Crout (kraut) to Eat and we ar doing very well. I have now to tell you whear I have bin in prison. I was captured on the 11th of June 1864 and taken to Andersonvill, Georgia, a most God forsaken place I ever Saw and turned into a large Stockade without a bit of Shelter from

**"Give my love to
all and tell my little
ones that Pappa
will soon come
home to see them."**

-letter home, Pvt. Samuel Poysell,
Co. E, 95th Ohio Vol. Infantry.
Died on the *Sultana*.

the Sun or rain. I remained there until the 21st of Sept When there was a Speshel Exchange at Shermans lines, and I went out for exchange. and you may (imagine) my disappointment when I hear that they would not Exchange the men Captured. from there I was Sent to Savanna Georgia and Staid 4 weeks. then to Lawton (Camp Lawton was a stockade prison similar to Andersonville, located in Millen, Georgia) and so on all over the State. I Saw your Brother Elliot in Sumpter (another name for Andersonville), but we got separated last fall (fall). but I hope he has bin Exchanged before this and home. He was in tolerable health. I have had hard times but not as hard as Some, for the last Summer I made some money by Selling Cooked rice and other things. And last fall I kept a Sutler stand and made a good deal of money. and i bought me and Will good close. but I have had (hard Luck). some one Stole my pocket Book and all my money amount to 38 dolls in all. and after that I Sufered a great deal of hunger for we only got half a pint of meal and half a pint of Nigger peas for one day and that only made one meal a day. I Expect I will make you tired reading Sutch long letters, but it has bin so long since I have wrote to you that I dont know when to stop. Oh if I only know weather you was all alive and well how thankful I would be. but I hope for the best and am waiting paisently for a letter from you So I will know weather I have a darling wife and little ones yet. I dont know when I shal be exchanged but they are looking for the reb prisners to exchange for us every day. then we are to be sent to Camp Chace (Chase) and get furlows home. then I can tell you all of my ups & downs while a prisner witch I would not write in a week. Oh my dear Wife how often I have thought

of you and my little ones and only wished you knew that I was alive and that I could get a letter from you. but you must not think I lost any love for you. Oh no my Dear, I still love you and hope Soon to be with you. I am glad my time is So near out. only a little over 4 months more to Serve and I don't think I shall ever have to go to the front again. Oh wont that be a happy time wen I can come home to Stay with my loving family. Noe my Dear, you must write often to me and I hope the times wont be long wen we Can talk. I have almost forgot how you and the children look for I have not Saw you for over two years. wen I left Memphis to go on the raid wher I was captured I left all my things. they were as follows. Overcoat, two Blankets, a pair of new pants, all my Pictures, and portfolia full of letters wich I hope was Sent home to you. if So write and let me know. Tell me all you can from home weather Father & Mother is alive and all of them I shall Stop for this time and hope to meet you Soon. Wen you write, direct you letter to S. W. Poysell, Camp Fisk, Vicksburg, Miss, Co F, fifth Battalion, and I will get it. you need not put my Regiment or Co on it. I forgot to Say that they fired one hundred Guns last evening over the fall of Richmond. I hope it is So, and hope the time is near when we can fire a national Salute over the fall of the confedracry. I will not write untill I hear from you now, as this is the Second letter. give my love to all and tell my little ones that Pappa will Soon come to See them. So good Bye until we meet a gain, or until I write again

From your Husband S. W. Poysell"

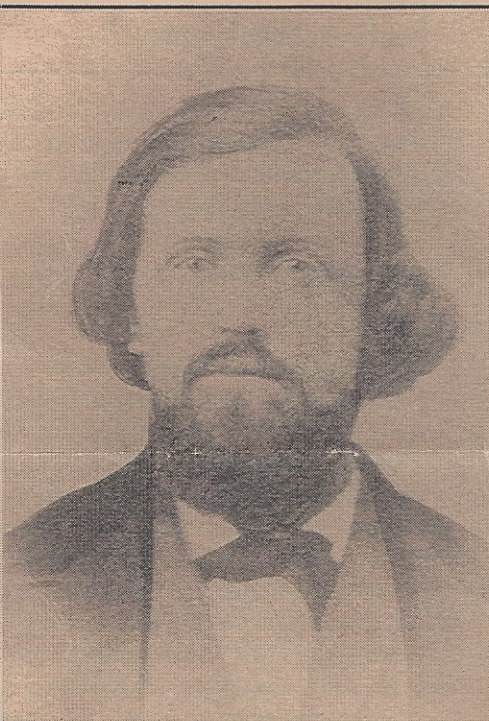
Florence Kind of the Woodlands, Texas, sent a Civil War reminiscence written by Cpl. James R. Collins (3rd TN Cav). Collins survived the war and the Sultana disaster and lived in Cleveland, TN after the war with his first wife, Kiziah Seaborn. (His second wife was Nannie Sarth). He was a shoemaker and harness maker. The following is an excerpt of this story printed, curiously enough, in a Kansas newspaper (he lived in Tennessee all his life). He begins by telling about being captured by Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest's men at Sulphur Trestle, AL:

"Our captors immediately started with us, under strong guard, southward. After traveling three days we came onto a railroad. Here we found two trains of freight cars waiting to carry us to the Confederate prison at Cahaba, Ala.

Boarding these trains we now started on one of the saddest and most gloomy rides many of us had ever undertaken. To make matters worse, the front train was wrecked by being derailed. We were on this train about two days. (After then being loaded on a boat) we arrived at our destination.

This prison had been an old cotton warehouse in former days, and within its dark and gloomy walls we took up our abode, not having the least idea when we could get out of there.

The horrors of the battlefield and of war in general were tame in comparison to what soldiers had to endure in these fearful



SAMUEL POYSELL, C. 1861

prison houses. Starvation and disease were the enemies to be encountered here and were two fold more deadly than musket balls.

I shall not endeavor to give a detailed description of the routine and monotony of our prison life. Suffice it to say that we suffered untold horrors there. In addition to the want of food, the proximity of the prison to the river allowed the water, when the river became swollen from the frequent rains, to rise up into the building and cover the floor to a depth of from one to three and four feet deep. Our building was not far from some cordwood which our captors furnished us, and on these pens we were enabled to keep out of water when the place was flooded. For six long, weary months we lived in this dreadful existence, and ached every day for a breath of pure air and

a sight of the glorious blue sky once more." He then speaks of the Sultana disaster:

"The first I knew of the terrible catastrophe that had befallen us was when I awakened from sleep by the timbers of the upper deck together with clouds of cinders and ashes, falling on me and pinning me to the deck, I being asleep on the lower deck. Hundreds of other soldiers were sleeping on the deck, crowded together as thick as they could find room to lie. The other two decks the upper and hurricane were likewise crowded with sleeping men.

As soon as I awakened from sleep, I found myself fastened tightly by the mass of timber that had fallen from above, so that I could hardly move. The immense cloud of hot coals and cinders rained down upon us and I could feel my flesh being burned and scorched as I lay there, exerting all the energy I possessed to clear myself from the wreckage. I was successful in extricating myself, after being badly burned by the hot cinders and scalding stream from the exploded boilers of the boat.

Never will I forget the scene that I then witnessed. Quickly following the explosion, the Sultana caught on fire and soon she was a blazing furnace of angry, devouring flames.

When the tremendous shock came most of the men sleeping on the upper and hurricane decks were blown into the river and nearly all of them were drowned on the spot. Hundreds of poor fellows sleeping on the lower deck where I was were securely pinned down by the great heap of wrecked timbers that fell upon them and all efforts to rescue them were futile, on account of the fire, and many of them who had not been killed at first were burned alive before the eyes of the helpless but more fortunate comrades, who could do nothing to save them from their horrible fate.

As soon as I could clear myself from the wreck, I began to look for father, who was on the boat with me. I soon found him and saw that he was badly hurt, though he had also succeeded in getting clear of the wrecked timbers. I knew that we could remain a very few minutes as the flames were mounting higher and higher, so I spoke to my father and told him we would have to try to save ourselves the best way we could.

We bade each other good-bye, and at once prepared to jump into the river. My father sprang into the water and seized a plank. That was the last time I ever saw him. I made my way to the bow of the boat, and catching hold of a rope that was hanging from bow down to the water, I let myself down into the river. Just as my feet struck the water, a drowning man seized me in a deathless grip, and all that saved me from sharing his fate was my hold on the rope. I saw the poor fellow at last loosen his hold and go down to rise no more.

Then, losing my hold on the rope, I sprang into the raging, chilly water. The spring freshet was than on, and the great Mississippi was out of banks and spread for miles over the country on each side of its course.

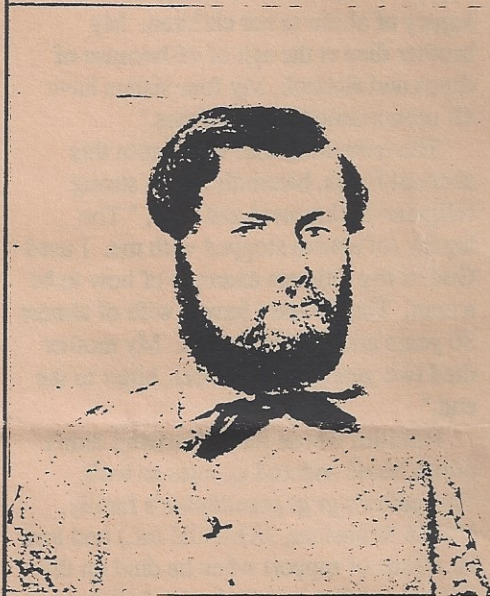
Swimming part of the way, and then turning on my back and floating, I went several miles down the river, and finally came to some saplings into which I climbed. I did not know that I was burned so badly until I got out of the water. But when I pulled myself up into the branches of one of those trees, I found that I was badly burned and scalded on several different portions of my body, and as soon as I had left the cooling influence of the chilly water, the pains from the burns became intense.

I had hardly got secure in the tree, before someone called to me from a small bunch of trees near by, and asked me to come over there, that there was a floating log there wedged in among the trees, upon which we could stand. I accepted this comrade's invitation and was soon beside him on the floating log. I then ascertained that there were three or four more men in the trees that were scattered about. One poor fellow who was in a tree a little distance from us seemed to be terribly wounded, from the groans that escaped his lips, and in a few minutes we heard him strike the water, and then all was still. He had undoubtedly been so seriously hurt that his strength had failed him after he had reached the tree, and he fell into the water to be instantly drowned. We had not been in our precarious refuge very long before we heard a boat coming up near the opposite shore. We screamed and yelled with all the strength of our lungs to attract their attention, but it went straight on, and we almost despaired of being rescued at all.

I shivered from cold, my clothes, of

course, being dripping wet, and suffering intense agony from the burns on my body, and never shall I forget the horror of those long hours I spent out there in those trees in the great river, hoping against hope that some kind fate might rescue us from our terrible plight.

It seems that providence must have heard our cries, for some time after daylight we saw, to our great joy and relief, the same boat that had gone up the river and passed by, coming down again on our side and making straight for us. The boat was soon alongside of our refuge, and numb with cold and sick with pain we were picked up and



ADAM SCHNEIDER, 183rd OH

put aboard. (We then went) on down the river to Memphis, picking up men all the way down. Arriving at Memphis, all those disabled were sent to the hospital. I remained in the hospital until my wounds were partially healed, sufficient to enable me to travel. From Memphis we were transferred to Camp Chase, Ohio, the place to which we had started on the unfortunate *Sultana*. There we were paid off, and by a special order of the war department we were sent to our respective states to be mustered out of the service. The Tennessee troops were sent to Nashville, and there we found the remainder of our regiment, the third Tennessee cavalry, and we were mustered out together, after which each fellow struck out for his own dear sweet home, happy, Oh! so happy to get there again.

So thus ended one of the most tragic and lamentable events that ever occurred in the history of our county. When the news of

that awful tragedy was sent abroad, many a home was darkened with grief and sorrow that had been happy in anticipation of the home-coming of a father, a son, or perhaps a brother or sweetheart..

And those poor fellow who died in that awful catastrophe! ...Seventeen hundred of them were either burned to death or went down into a watery grave at the bottom of the great river."

Dana R. Spencer sent papers regarding Josias W. Jones, a *Sultana* survivor. He was 18 when he enlisted in the 18th Michigan Infantry (in 1862). He was a wagoner and a teamster. When applying for a pension in 1891 he stated: "That ever since I left the army in 1865 I have been suffering from rheumatism, loss of eyesight, and nervous exhaustion. That on the 27th day of April 1865 I was on the steamer *Sultana* which exploded on the Mississippi River and have been subject to nervous disability ever since. That in the year 1885, I had a severe stroke of paralysis and ever since have been subject to frequent dizzy spells. That during the war (I was) in prison at Cahaba, Ala. (for) eight months and when I was released my eyesight was almost entirely gone. That I am a painter by trade and carried it on in connection with the mercantile business and that after 1885 I was obliged to give it up on account of the dizzy spells. That since 1885 I have by advice of my physician taken long and frequent vacations from business in order to recuperate from nervous disabilities and that in consequence of the above named disabilities at the present time I am incapable to perform any manual labor whatever." -Josias W. Jones

Jones told his son about "Picking wheat and oat kernels out the mule manure to stay alive in prison."

His obituary related: "Mr. Jones had many thrilling and interesting experiences while in the service. One of these was that of being sent out to chop wood when he was prisoner in Morgan Castle (Cahaba Prison). He and two other Union soldiers worked all day and were then shut up in a barn with a guard stationed at the door. Removing a board from the floor the three escaped and were soon a good distance from the barn. They were tracked by bloodhounds and climbed trees to save their lives. Caught by their pursuers, Mr. Jones was placed on short rations and the other two soldiers were kept in shackles for some months. At the National

Encampment of the GAR held in Toledo last year (date not given), he was the only surviving old soldier who was aboard the *Sultana* when she was blown up by the bursting of her boiler."

Not all survivors were matter-of-fact in their reminiscences nor did their memories grow sweeter after the war. One such soldier was Winfield Scott Pottle. A descendant wrote of him: "Winfield Scott Pottle (sometimes misspelled as 'Pattle'), was a passenger on the *Sultana* when it blew up near Memphis. He was sleeping at the stern of the ship when the boiler exploded. He was a member of the Ohio 54th Infantry (Platt's Zouaves). He was captured while trying to defend General Sherman whom he calls 'Bitter' Sherman in his notes. He was hit on his head with a Confederate sabre and taken as prisoner. He first went to Libby Prison, then to Belle Island, and from there to Andersonville. He describes his agony in his military records.

On board the *Sultana*, he was thrown from the stern of the ship where he was sleeping next to someone with the last name of White. He and the other soldier clung to debris and were rescued by a fisherman in a boat. His name was apparently put on the dead list and his father who also fought in the war, came to retrieve his body only to find him alive.

He never was the same after Andersonville and the *Sultana*. One thing he wrote was 'I can still see myself as with my own eyes, crawling, weak from hunger and dying of thirst. God forgive

them, I can't. ' "

This descendant continues: "He suffered and some of that suffering echoed down to present generations. There are those of us who suffer from the after effects of a war we never knew. His daughter had to take care of him until he was placed in the Soldier's Home in Ohio. She was very bitter because of having to take care of him to the exclusion of all else. So bitter in fact, that she burned all of his things upon his death. She raised her granddaughter because the child's mother died at age 28. The anger and resentment was passed on to this granddaughter (my mother) who grew up an angry woman and who carried on the legacy of abuse to her children. My brother died at the age of 46 because of drugs and alcohol. My four sisters have all been married several times."

The remaining son, who wrote this account for us, blessedly, has a strong religious background and says, "The legacy (of abuse) stopped with me. I used God as my ultimate example of how to be a man. Thank God I have a wife of almost 30 years and two great sons. My mother died two years ago of cancer, bitter to the end."

Families whose father/husband didn't return home endured agonies as well. This editor's gr gr grandfather's family, (Adam Schneider, 183rd OH Inf.) had lost its means of support when he died on the *Sultana*. Adam and Catherine had three small daughters and, blessedly, all found good husbands within their German

community in Cincinnati and had long and happy marriages. But the horror of losing their husband/father never went away. In 1904 the middle daughter, Hannah, wrote to the Survivors of the *Sultana* Association in Knoxville, TN:

"Cincinnati, April 24th 1904

Dear Sirs,

With sorrow in my heart, I will write a few lines to you, and gratefully do I thank you all to remember this terrible catastrophe where, at the time our poor father and husband lost his life and so many faithful soldiers. He, promising to be at home to his dear ones, never returned. But a friend, died some time ago, lived to tell about it (Michael Conrad). This man, being a very careless disposition, could not for any reason be wakened on any other night, but April 27th always brought him to our house and cry, cry, like a baby. It certainly was terrible. I am with your reunion in spirit and I hope to be with them as long as they live. My father was Adam Schneider, 183rd Ohio Regiment.

Our mother is still living at the age of 80 almost 81 and is making her home with my oldest sister where she would gladly hear from you.

Mrs. Braunwart and all the others"

And so, the tales go on. Every family who lost someone on the *Sultana* has a story to tell; these are just a few of them. Let's keep on telling them so these men will never really die. ■

"THE HONOR ROLL OF THE DEAD"

Continuing the original *Sultana* Survivors Associations' custom of calling out the names of the *Sultana* soldiers who had passed away since the previous reunion, we carry on by calling out the names of Union soldiers from the great state of Ohio:

115th Ohio Infantry: Thomas Rue, William H. H. Smith, Deming Norton Lowrey, Perry H. Alexander, Thomas Evans, James Patterson, Charles, B. Goldswood, Robert Cox, John Culnon, W. Dana, James M. Darrow, William Davis, Jr., Daniel Myers, Charles Napp, William McKinney, Eli Thompson, John Everhart. 116th Ohio Infantry: Emanuel Okey. 120th Ohio Infantry: William Pettinger.. 121st Ohio Infantry: John A. Robinson. 124th Ohio Infantry: Henry B. Wallace, Granville M. McDonal. 125th Ohio Infantry: John Adams, H. Jackson, Lucius W. Waters. 135th Ohio Infantry: William Lugenbeal. 153rd Ohio Infantry: Josephus Test. 174th Ohio Infantry: George R. McDaniel. 175th Ohio Infantry: James Moore, Martin L Rice, Thomas J. McKeehan, George W. Conover, Francis M. Harover, James Bayne Wesley Bybee, William Carroll, Samuel A. Holmes, William O. Myers. William Richmond, William Shelton, Thomas J. Gray, George W. Hendrixon, Timothy Meeker, George W. Staton, William H. McCoy, Edward Barnes, James Conover, William Barrer, Benton Badgely, Norman Bercaw, George W. Boyd, W.S. Cotton, Henry Hudson, James Hudson, Nathan Lemons, Stacy Morris, Matthew T. Van Eman, Henry Smith. 178th Ohio Infantry: Silas Sherwood. 183rd Ohio Infantry: George W. Piller, Michael Conrad, Peter Rohland, August Sanker, Adam Schnieder, Joseph Miller, John Gunther, Charles Caddy, John Getterman, Darius Minier, John Bahn, Joseph Lickleitner, Gustave Zehfuss, W. J. Baum gardiner, Thomas Oliver, Lucius B. Sulcer.

to be continued.....

We shall meet, but we shall miss him,
 There will be one vacant chair
 We shall linger to caress him
 As we breathe our evening prayer.

When a year ago we gathered
 Joy was in his mild blue eye
 But a golden cord is severed
 And our hopes in ruin lie.

We shall meet, but we shall miss him,
 There will be one vacant chair
 We shall linger to caress him
 As we breathe our evening prayer.

-Popular Civil War ballad

FROM THE EDITOR

We are all, in many ways, products of those who went before us and it is important to remember and talk about those ancestors.

The Roll of Honor is one such way in which I try to do just that. It takes a long time to type all the names, but as I do so I try to focus on each name as a person. I wonder what kind of husband or father this man was; I notice the same last names listed and wonder: father and son? brothers? And, noting that one lived and one died (or both died) I can only imagine the impact that this has had on the surviving families. For each one that

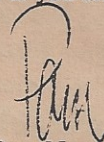
lived, I wonder: Was he able to put this terrible experience behind him, or, like Winfield Scott Pottle, did it destroy his spirit and his health and deeply affect future generations of this family? These are sobering thoughts.

On a lighter note I'm happy to report that Gene Saleckers's book, *Disaster on the Mississippi*, is selling well and Gene is getting more and more calls to speak. He will come to Michigan in April and address my Civil War Round Table as well. If you don't yet have his book, run out and get it now! And, of course, I'm sure you have long ago purchased Jerry Potter's excellent book, *The Sultana Tragedy*.

I continue to receive lots of interesting

e-mail regarding the *Sultana*. One such letter comes from a student in Florida who is writing a research paper for history class in which he will describe "the feelings and reactions of people at the time of the disaster, then talk about the feelings and reactions of people today." He says the instructor already knows about the disaster. Needless to say, I will send all he needs and more!

As fall turns into winter and we (up north at least) struggle with the weather during the holidays, I wish warmth and happiness to you and yours. God Bless!



Pam Newhouse, Editor

NEW SUBSCRIBERS

- Clifford S. Ely, (desc. of Sgt. John Ely, 115th OH),
1010 S. Second St., Denton TX 21629
- Natalie Kinsey-Warnock (desc. of Capt. Deming Lowrey, 115th OH)
RD 3, Box 36A, Barton VT 05822
- Ian N. Wheeler, (desc. of Capt. Deming Lowrey, 115th OH)
9213 Briary Lane, Fairfax VA 22031
- Nelson O. Wheeler (desc. of Capt. Deming Lowrey, 115th OH)
170 Washington Ave, Palo Alto, CA 94301
- Roderick D. Wheeler (desc. of Capt. Deming Lowrey, 115th OH)
Palo Alto, CA 94303
- Jeane Swindle, 2527 Berdan Ave. Toledo, OH 43613
- William & Marsha Stewart, Sr., P.O. Box
2027, Muncie IN 43707 J

- Edward C. Hall. Ph.D, 1202 Forest Drive, Portage, MI 49002
- Helen Kinsey, 18 Slim Brown Rd., Milton, VT 05468-3592
- Mr. & Mrs. Frederick Kinsey, RD3 Box 36, Barton, VT 05822
- Robert Kinsey, Rte 2, Box 1026, Craftsbury Common VT 05827
- Blaine Kinsey 278 Main St. Montpelier, VT 05602
- Mrs. Berry Jane Oxier, 25773 Flanders Place, Carmel CA 93923
- Mark D. Okey, (Desc. of Emanuel Okey, 116h OH),
274 Creekside Circle N.E., North Canton, OH 44720
- Robert Julian, 208 Woodland Dr., Sweetwater, TN 37874
- Martie Lemos, (desc. of George Freeland, 23rd MI),
4145 Creekwood Court, Pleasanton, CA 94588
- Audry Tuschen, (desc. of George Freeland, 23rd MI),
3825 Fujuyama Way, Redding, CA 96001.