

Historically Speaking

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Leander Herron: Congressional Medal of Honor Winner

Written by Julie Spilinek,
Historical Society Secretary

A suggestion was recently made that the life of Leander Herron be used as the main feature in this issue of *Historically Speaking*. He was Nebraska's first recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor. I was not aware of this individual until I read the following information and found it most fascinating. I hope you do. Some of the information is repetitive but I felt it was also interesting.

The first article was written by Janet Hruza of St. Paul for the *Entering Howard County* book but it was not included. The second item is from an April 7, 1937, newspaper article. The third article is also from a newspaper or magazine. On August 10, 1995, the *Ord Quiz* published a lengthy article when Mr. Herron's grandson visited Fort Hartsuff.



In 1930, 84-year-old Lee Herron officially received his Medal of Honor from Capt. Eddie Rickenbacker, the World War I flying ace. The picture was taken during an interview of Herron at Radio City Music Hall.

many years in Bucks County. Lee's mother died when Leander "Lee" was two years old, and he was placed in the care of his mother's sister, Aunt Kate.

Under her care, he attended schools in Faldington until 1856 when his father remarried, and Lee moved to Hannahville, Vanango County, Pennsylvania.

At the age of twelve, Lee drove a packet on a canal between Erie and Pittsburgh. But when Fort Sumpter was fired upon, he longed to join the army, and on August 9, 1861, at the age of fifteen years, he enrolled as a Private in New Brighton, Pennsylvania in Company C, 83rd Regiment of the Infantry Volunteers. At this time he weighed 101 pounds, and was five feet one inch tall. He entered active duty December 7, 1863, and discharged with the rank of Private on June 28, 1865, at the close of the war.

Mr. Herron returned to Pennsylvania, and for two years worked drilling oil wells near Pitthole, PA. The Indian Wars then drew him west in the autumn of 1866, where he reenlisted at Fort Dodge, Kansas, and was a mail courier with the pony express along the Santa Fe Trail. At that time he was attached to Custer's Seventh U.S. Cavalry under temporary command of

Leander Taylor Herron History

Compiled by Janet Hruza for
Howard County History Book 2000

Leander Taylor Herron, a Civil War veteran, was born at Faldington, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, on December 29, 1846. He was the son of Dr. and Mrs. George Herron. His father practiced medicine for

A Message From the President *Kaye Tomlinson*

Our Historical Village is in very good condition. We have had our share of visitors.

The new building is coming along slowly. It should be open sometime in 2017 and will be filled with displays of all the different wars. Also we have one fine display about Indians that is very educating and fun and also one of the new displays is about our churches a long time ago.

Our school has been visited with thousands of bees. We don't like them, but they like us. We are trying to have them taken care of, but it is hard to do.

We have purchased a new computer and copier with funds from the Estate of Fred and Nora Sonderup. All of our records will be put on the computer by Ron Sack and Marion Bahensky. Then all of our records will be in one place and will be safe and we can add to them when ever we need to. Donita Anderson was the one who searched out a good computer and copier for us.

All in all, everyone is working hard volunteering on Saturdays and Sundays to keep the Village open on weekends all summer long. We had a pie sale during GCA Days and it was a money maker for our Society.

The lawn is being mowed this summer by Randy from the City and it is a big help for the Historical Society because all of our officers are too old to mow.

Roger Goettsche has been busy sodding our lawn and he had help from Dewayne Barleen and Roger Finningsmier. It is looking great!

Soon it will be time to decorate for Halloween and the holidays.

The Gruber House is looking wonderful. It has a new back porch with chairs and flowers. Marion Bahensky has done a terrific job with help from her friends. Our Gruber House is wonderful.

I'm hoping that some of you who haven't

paid your dues will, because all that money is what we keep our Village thriving with.

Keep smiling and remember all the things we use, houses we live in and businesses we have will all be part of "A Historical Society" some day.

Thanks and God Bless

General Sully. In time, he became good friends with General Custer and his wife, Elizabeth.

In October of 1866, he took part in the rescue of the Box family by riding into a large Indian encampment, and bartered for the lives of the two little girls. Upon return to the Fort, they were put under the care of Elizabeth Custer.

His fiercest encounter, however, was in the Battle of Little Coon Creek, forty miles east of Fort Dodge, Kansas. At this time he was a Corporal, attached to Co. A., 3rd U.S. Infantry. It was told that on September 2, 1868, while carrying a dispatch to his post with another enlisted man, Paddy O'Boyle, they came upon four men under attack by fifty hostile Indians.

They joined the men, sharing their rifles and ammunition. During the night, after two of the men were severely wounded and the ammunition was reduced to a few rounds, Lee stayed with the men while Mr. O'Boyle escaped back to camp for help. At the midnight call-to-arms, the soldiers raced to their rescue still dressed in their underwear and nightshirts. Upon arriving at the scene, the Indians mistaking the white clad figures in the moonlight for ghosts, hurriedly retreated. Leander and the men counted nearly 500 arrows imbedded around them. For his unselfish act of heroism, Corporal Herron was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, the highest military award given.

In 1870, Corporal Herron's term of service expired, and he returned to Franklin, Pennsylvania, where he married Miss Emma Hill. She was born in 1845, Canal, Vanango County, Pennsylvania. In 1874, he again came West accompanied by his wife and two year old son. He located at Fort Hartsuff where he was employed by the U.S. Government as an engineer in constructing of the Fort.

In the spring of 1876, he moved to Howard County, Nebraska, and bought the Curry farm, located one mile east of the North Loup bridge, near St. Paul. He traded Mr. Curry his team, harness, and \$75 for the land. Later that summer, the Custer Massacre took place and the Indians everywhere went on the warpath.



Lee Herron's grave, north of the Veterans Circle in Elmwood Cemetery, has a marker noting he was a winner of the prestigious Congressional Medal of Honor. He died in St. Paul on April 5, 1937 at the age of 90.

Mr. Herron was ordered back to Fort Hartsuff to build a stockade for protection. Late in the fall of 1896, hard times and grasshoppers caused Lee to move back to Pennsylvania to work in the oil fields while Mrs. Herron held down their claim. After the claim was proved up on the land, Mrs. Herron joined Lee and finally in 1884, the family, now a son and daughter, were able to return to St. Paul. Mr. Herron was a miller at the St. Paul Flour Mills.

In 1921, Lee was invited to Washington, D.C. as an official mourner for the burial of the "Unknown Soldier" at the Arlington Cemetery.

Emma Herron, who was in poor health due to a fractured hip in 1920, passed away July 6, 1925, at age eighty. Mr. Herron continued to live at his home on 7th Street, just north of the CB&Q Railroad tracks in St. Paul.

Every morning at 6:00 A.M., Lee raised the American Flag in his front yard, and every evening he retired it. His usual daily routine included walk-

ing to the post office, and stopping at the home of Mr. Hill, another Civil War veteran, to visit.

In 1930, Leander was invited to New York to be interviewed on a radio program by Eddie Rickenbacker, WWI Flying Ace. It was on this trip he was finally presented with the Congressional Medal of Honor by Eddie Rickenbacker himself.

Leander and Emma had two children: Frank and Hildred. Frank R. Herron of Port Angeles, Washington, had a son Frank, Jr., who with his wife Jean still live in Spokane, Washington. Daughter Hildred Herron married Stanley Mead, and had a son Millard, who married Marjorie Johnson.

Leander Herron died on April 5, 1937. Both Lee and Emma Herron are buried at the Elmwood Cemetery in St. Paul. A special plaque for the Medal of Honor recipient was placed on the monument within the circle at the cemetery by the local American Legion Post 119.

April 7, 1937

Lee Herron, Civil War Veteran, Passes Away Noted Indian Fighter; Holder of Congressional Medal of Honor; Had Interesting Life

Mr. Herron Enlisted in the Civil War at New Brighton, Pennsylvania at the Age of Fifteen; Spent Considerable Time Fighting the Indians in Early Days of the New West.

Lee Herron, honored and respected citizen of St. Paul for many years, died at his home on Monday morning following a short illness. Mr. Herron had been in his usual good health until about nine days before he was taken ill with pneumonia, complicated with heart trouble, and he gradually failed until the end came.

Mr. Herron was the only holder, in Nebraska of the Congressional Medal of Honor, presented to him for an exceptional act of bravery during the Indian wars following the war. The story of his life first as a canal packet driver, soldier of the Civil War, Indian Scout, oil driller in Pennsylvania and in Trans Caucasia and as a pioneer of Howard county, business man and traveller would make very interesting reading.

Leander Taylor Herron was the son of Dr. and Mrs. George Herron. He was born at Faldington, Buck County, Pennsylvania, on the Delaware River, December 19, 1846.

When Fort Sumpter was fired on he longed to join the army and when volunteers were called for he made several attempts to join, but on account of his age he was refused.

He returned to Pennsylvania. Shortly after his return he was married to Miss Emma Hill, at Franklin, Penn.

In 1874, he again came west accompanied by his wife and two year old son, and located at Fort Hartsuff where he was employed by the government as a government engineer during the time the buildings were being constructed. In the spring of 1876 they moved to Howard county, and soon afterward bought what was known as the Curry farm, trading

Mr. Curry his team, harness and \$75.00 in cash.

Hard times and the grasshoppers forced Mr. Herron to return to Pennsylvania to work in the oil regions.

In 1884, Mr. and Mrs. Herron and their two children, a boy and a girl, came west, locating in St. Paul, Nebraska, and building a home. Mr. Herron, for a number of years was a miller in the St. Paul flour mills.

However, on December 10, 1863, he was enrolled as a Private, at New Brighton, Pa., in Co. C. 83 Reg., was mustered into service of the United States as such in the 24th Dist. of Pennsylvania for the period of three (3) years. He weighed 101 pounds and was five feet and one inch tall.

He was mustered out with his company June 28, 1865 in the field of Virginia by reason of the close of the war. After Lee's surrender to General Grant, Mr. Herron returned to Pennsylvania.

Perhaps the fiercest encounter in which Mr. Herron ever shared risk in the Battle of Little Coon forty miles east of Fort Dodge, Kansas. By virtue of his deeds at this time while a corporal member of Co. A, 3rd U.S. Inf., having gone to the assistance of a party of four enlisted men who were attacked by about fifty Indians and remained with them until the party was relieved, he received the Congressional Medal of Honor, the highest distinction which the government can confer for valor commendation.

In recognition of the distinction of possessing the Congressional Medal of Honor, on November 11, 1921, Mr. Herron went to Washington, D.C. having been selected as one of the official mourners of this great nation at the burial of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery. This was one of the most solemn and impressive ceremonies that America has ever witnessed.

It is not known what newspaper or article this account appeared in or the time frame in which it was written.

Congressional Medal of Honor Winner Lee Herron Is Buried at St. Paul

By H. Sonny Wells
Midwest Researcher

Medal of Honor Historical Society

The marker on the grave reads Lee Herron and lists his dates. The grave site is modest and clean as is the rest of the extremely well kept St. Paul,

Nebraska cemetery. Just a few yards away, to the southwest is the Veterans Memorial Circle with its G.A.R. monument.

In fact, if you didn't look close you might miss the words . . . "Recipient . . . Congressional Medal of Honor . . ." on the front of the small grey granite block which marks the site.

The story of Leander Herron is not an easy one to trace. Had it not been for an article in a local newspaper following his death, only his military record would be known.

Among the most notable of his achievements was the receiving of the Medal of Honor for his part in a daring, lifesaving rescue during the Indian wars following the Civil War.

Although the exact date of the awarding of the medal is lost in history, it is believed to have been in the spring of 1869.

Accounts of the event vary greatly from a maximum of ten men on the trapped supply train, to as few as four. The attacking Indians had eight or fifty in their war party, depending on which story you read.

Exactly how Herron effected the rescue was never completely documented either. But it is recorded that he single-handedly rescued the encircled wagons, including several wounded troopers, from a very perilous, life threatening situation. This skirmish is recorded in the military records as the Battle of Little Coon Creek on September 2, 1868, near Ft. Dodge, Kansas.

There are other interesting documents in his file also. These papers show Herron's tendency to almost always be the right man in the right place, at the right time, who did the right thing, and was lucky enough to live to tell about it.

In October of 1868, Herron was involved in the rescue of a small wagon train from an Indian raiding party and later that month in the rescue of the Cosley family.

His Civil War record was far less eventful. His first attempt to enlist, in April of 1861, was rejected because of age, or more accurately, lack of age. Finally on December 10, 1862, he was accepted and enlisted in Co. C of the 83rd Pennsylvania Vol-

unteer Infantry for three years. The records show he was 5'1" tall and weighed 101 lbs.

After 15 days of instructional camp, Herron joined his unit in the field as part of Col. Butterfield's Brigade, Porter's Division, Army of the Potomac, assigned to the defense of Washington.

Shortly after his arrival the unit broke camp and became part of General Burnside's Second Virginia Campaign and were involved in the infamous "Mud March" of January 20-24, 1863.

While in the field, Herron's unit was involved in the Chancellorsville and Gettysburg Campaigns and later in the Wilderness and Petersburg Campaigns.

The 83rd was one of the units General Grant sent west to cut off Lee's retreat from Richmond, thus driving a wedge between the two remaining Confederate armies.

Herron and his unit were present at the surrender at Appomattox Courthouse and participated in the grand

review on May 23, 1865.

The unit had lost 13 officers and 423 men in battle, out of just over 1,400 enlistees, but Herron had come through without a serious injury. He was mustered out of service on June 28, 1865, in a field in northern Virginia and returned to the oil fields of Pennsylvania to look for work.

But the military was still in his blood. He re-enlisted in June of 1867, in Co. A of the 3rd U.S. Infantry and was assigned to Ft. Dodge, Kansas. It was during his tenure at Ft. Dodge that his heroic tendencies surfaced and he was promoted to corporal within weeks of his arrival.

Lee returned to the oil fields when his enlistment expired in June of 1870. It was here the love bug bit him and Miss Emma Hill of Franklin, Pennsylvania was soon to be his bride.

The year 1874 found the Herrons and their two-year-old son Frank at Ft. Hartsuff, Nebraska, where Lee was a civilian engineer with the army.

In 1876, Herron bought the Curry farm in Howard County for seventy five dollars, a team and a harness. After the Custer massacre at the Little Big Horn, Herron was ordered back to Ft. Hartsuff



Lee Herron, a Civil War veteran, won the Congressional Medal of Honor during the Indian wars.

to supervise construction of the new barracks but returned to the St. Paul area later that year.

Hard times and grasshoppers forced him out of farming that year and he returned to the oil fields to earn money to save the farm. The family joined him there in April 1877, after securing the farmstead.

In 1878 Herron was one of four men sent by the U.S. government to Tranconia on the Caspian Sea to instruct the Greeks in some of the newly developed techniques of oil drilling, but by 1884, the family with new daughter Hildred was back in the St. Paul area where he found work in one of the local flour mills. Herron also ran a second hand store which was more of a hobby than a business.

Ord Quiz, August 10, 1995

A Medal of Honor Day At Fort Hartsuff Grandson Learns About Life Of State's 1st Medal Winner

Editor's note - Two interesting visitors made stops at Fort Hartsuff State Historical Park last week. On this page are accounts of their visits.

During Fort Hartsuff's seven year existence, three soldiers stationed there won the Medal of Honor. But none was from Nebraska.

That doesn't mean, though, that Nebraska's first resident winner of the nation's highest military honor never served at the fort north of Elyria.

In fact, Leander "Lee" Herron of St. Paul was one of the builders of Fort Hartsuff - but it was as a civilian.

Herron was engineer of the steam-powered saw mill and shingle mill brought in to help build Fort Hartsuff in 1874-75.

"All the lumber and shingles used in the fort were sawed by Leander Herron," said Roye Lindsay, superintendent of Fort Hartsuff State Historical Park.

Lindsay brushed up on his Herron history in preparation for a visit last week by Frank Herron of Spokane, Wash., Lee Herron's grandson and current possessor of Lee's Medal of Honor and most of his memorabilia.

During a trip to Nebraska to help dedicate a St. Paul museum display in honor of his grandfather, Frank Herron, with his daughter, Joella Sutherland, and granddaughter, Mary Sutherland, 14, of Red Wing, Minn. headed north to spend part of a day at Fort Hartsuff.

'A real revelation'

It was an emotional and eye opening visit. Frank

said. For the first time, Frank visited his grandfather's homestead north of St. Paul and his gravesite in the Elmwood Park Cemetery.

At the homestead, near where the North Loup and Middle Loup rivers join together, Frank saw for the first time the house built of cottonwood. "The one's in the cellar are like new," he said.

Mrs. Sutherland, Frank's daughter, reflected her father's emotion as she chronicled the trip to Nebraska. "This whole week has been a real revelation for him," she said.

Lindsay said the visit was important for the fort because it represented "direct lineal descendants of Leander Herron. We have his grandson, great-granddaughter and great-great-granddaughter right here on the grounds."

It was also significant, because it gave Lindsay a chance to ask about Lee Herron's invitation to the 1875 Grand Thanksgiving Ball at Fort Hartsuff. Frank still has his grandfather's original invitation.

"That's one of the reasons I wanted to get a hold of this family," Lindsay said with a smile.

Herron's visit to Nebraska was engineered by Janet Hruza of St. Paul, who operates the museum there.

Lee Herron's St. Paul connections had been severed by time and death, but Mrs. Hruza decided to look elsewhere. Through searches at the Howard County Courthouse and elsewhere, "I found Frank in Spokane," Hruza said.

She even flew to Spokane to talk to him personally and to photograph the Medal of Honor.

After Hruza's visit, Herron said he "made the decision to come and see all this for myself."

A true hero

He intended to bring the Medal of Honor with him and donate it to the St. Paul museum, but inadvertently left it at home. But he planned to ship it here soon after his return to Spokane.

Hruza said she hopes such a display will provide people, especially young people, with a hero.

"Kids have so many heroes who are sports figures," Hruza said. "We need some real men for heroes, men who were willing to give their lives for what they believed in. We need more heroes like that."

Herron fit that category when he won the Medal of Honor on the plains of Kansas near Fort Dodge in 1868.

He and another man, Paddy O'Boyle, who were carrying a dispatch from Fort Dodge at night, wound up saving four wounded men on a supply



Fort Hartsuff superintendent Roye Lindsay presents a commemorative mug from the fort to Frank Herron of Spokane, Wash., as Herron's daughter, Joella Sutherland, and granddaughter Mary Sutherland look on. Herron's grandfather, Medal of Honor winner Leander Herron, helped build Fort Hartsuff 120 years ago. This was Frank's first visit to the fort.—Quiz Photo by Doug Barber

wagon from about 50 Indians who had attacked them.

"He volunteered to give his life up to stay with those four men," Frank said. "It was sure death - only they made it."

After Lee Herron, whose nickname was Rosy because of his red cheeks, left the military he returned to Nebraska, which remained his home until he died in 1937 at age 90.

Friend of the famous

But Herron's adventures continued. He eventually returned to the oil fields of his native Pennsylvania and gained such a reputation that he was asked to go to Russia and advise them on oil production. He met many of the Russian leaders, including some who would help lead the Communist takeover of 1917.

"He knew Trotsky personally," Lindsay said. After the revolution, Leon Trotsky was Lenin's commissar of war for six years.

Lee Herron also claimed Gen. George and Elizabeth Custer as friends. Frank said he has letters Mrs. Custer wrote Lee and his wife in later years.

Herron did not actually receive his Medal of Honor until 1930 when it was presented at a ceremony in New York by Eddie Rickenbacker, the

World War I flying ace.

In his later years, Herron lived in St. Paul and was "kind of a grouchy old man," said Elnora Rohman, 84, who as a girl lived around the corner from the Herrons.

In 1926, Lee Herron returned to the long-abandoned Fort Hartsuff and left a pencil-written message on the wall of the barracks mess hall.

It includes his name, the date and his identification as the fort's engineer.

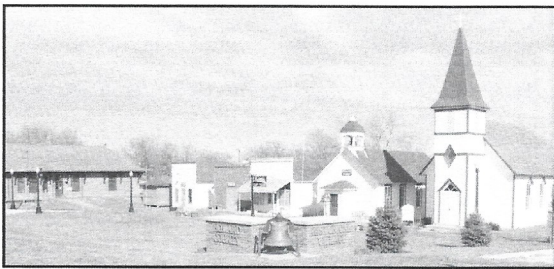
Never met grandfather

When Lindsay showed Lee's three descendants the faded inscription, now protected with some others by a sheet of plastic, they appeared as if they could almost see him there writing it.

Frank was 17 when his grandfather died, but he never met him. Frank and his family lived in Washington and Lee was in Nebraska.

"I never saw my grandfather and grandmother and that's not good," Frank said.

"I just knew the sketch of my grandfather I'd learned from relatives," Frank said as he stood in the barracks mess hall near his grandfather's writing on the wall. "But when I see the way people lived in places like this, in these barracks, I'm getting to know more about how he used to live."



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