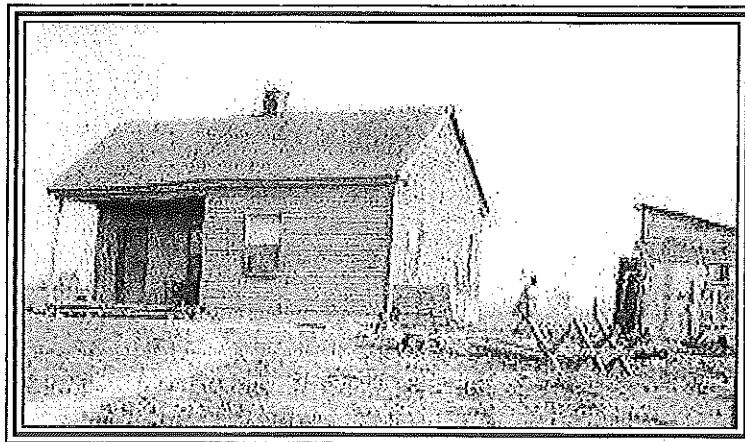




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OHIO GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

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## Interesting Note for Civil War Researchers: Refugees

by Susan Dunlap Lee

I am always on the lookout for new and possible ways to find some of our elusive Civil War Veterans and their families during and after the war. I found this letter from Shelbyville, Indiana, written by Walter P. Sexton concerning refugees during the Battle of Atlanta which may help to explain how some of our ancestors from the southern states managed to get to the northern states during the Civil War.

### Exodus of Decatur Refugees

Other Incidents of the 'Sixties' Told in Letter Sent to Decatur

The Dekalb bureau of vital statistics received several days ago the following letter from Walton (sp) A. Sexton, former resident of Decatur, who now lives in Hoboken, N.J. It contains a number of highly interesting facts about the early history of the city and tells, among other things, of the experiences of the refugees who went out of Decatur during the battle of Atlanta. Mr. Sexton wrote the letter seeking to find information about his birth certificate, the letter follows: Hoboken, N.J., July 14, 1934. To the Bureau of Vital Statistics, Decatur, GA: I write you to determine if any record or evidence of my birth can be found in Decatur. My name is Walter Alonzo Sexton, and I was born in Decatur, Ga., April 4, in the year A.D. 1864, during the terrible Civil war, that blasted me from my birthplace and native land. If our home in Decatur had not been destroyed by a battle (or skirmish) which took place there when I was an infant in the cradle I would, perhaps, have been raised there and living there right now. I have often wished I had been raised there and had never so learned the world as I have. My father name was Franklin Clark Sexton, and he was born and raised in Macon, Ga.; my mother's maiden name was Climelia Mauldin, and she was born in Lawrenceville, Ga. I had one sister, about six years older than myself and her full name was Emma Octavia Sexton. I had but one brother, and his full name was Joshua Glenn Sexton. He was 12 or 13

years older than I: and then I had many aunts and uncles in various parts of Georgia and we all got lost from one another during the war, but after the war all who did not get killed in the struggle, eventually found one another. My father was a tanner and tanned leather in Decatur during the war, and as the government required his services in the tannery than in the army he served only six weeks in the army. My father was a very tall man (6 feet 5 inches) and was well known in and around Decatur during the years he lived there. His best friend in Decatur was a very well-known old resident, whose name was John Swanton. He had a son, John Swanton, Jr., who possibly may be alive. If he is, I judge he is well up in the 80's. If he is alive I am sure he would remember me, for I was quit a famous baby in Decatur for a good many years on account of a most narrow and thrilling escape from total destruction which I experienced during the battle that destroyed our home and other homes in Decatur. At that time very few cellars were in Decatur, but John Swanton had one under his house and if we all had not been fortunate enough to gain admittance to John Swanton's cellar some of us, or all of us, might have been killed. When cannon balls began to strike our house and go through it my father said to my mother: "Our only hope is to try to make it over to the Swanton's house and get in his cellar. You carry the baby (which was me), and I will carry your mother (who was very feeble and blind)." My mother ran to my cradle to get me and just as she lifted me out of the cradle a cannon ball

passed through our house and in passing through struck my cradle and knocked it into fragments. It was that, the first hair breath escape among many in my life that made me famous in Decatur for many years. A few days after that marvelous escape I left Decatur and did not return until 20 years later, when I went back on a visit and talked with John Swanton, his son and his son's daughter, a young lady of about 17 at that time. She would do (sp) doubt remember me if she is still living. John Swanton and his son and granddaughter lived in about the nicest house and place in Decatur. If I remember right their home stood on slightly elevated ground and was surrounded by a large yard, and in the yard were several piles of cannon balls which Mr. Swanton collected after the battle. The first thing he told me when I visited him in 1885 was about my narrow and marvelous escape from the cannon ball and how he had traced that cannon ball and found it and kept it on exhibition in his front yard. He told me that everybody in Decatur had viewed it and marveled at my marvelous escape, and wondered what my lot would be, and if I would ever return to Decatur. I did return, but too late to see the cannon ball that demolished my cradle, for Mr. Swanton told me it had been stolen a few years previous. I was shown the spot where the house stood in which I was born. When the battle was over we came out of Swanton's cellar and returned to our home to find everything swept away, even the horses, cows, hogs and chickens were gone and we were homeless and at once became what they called refugees in those days. We were herded in with many other homeless people and loaded on a freight train, like so many cattle, and landed in Nashville, Tenn., and herded in horrible camps for several weeks, when we were again loaded on a freight train and landed in Louisville and, with hundreds of other families were crowded into an old opera house from which the seats had been removed and the floor was inclined, which made it uncomfortable for the many unfortunates crowded in there. During the many

weeks we spent in those horrible refugee camps I caught and fought off and whipped every contagious disease that children are heir to. Several of the government doctors came around to say a few farewell words and take a look at me, the child that was so hard to kill. One of them looked at me and said: "There is the most patient little sufferer I ever saw." Another looked at me and said: "That little fellow was not put on this earth for nothing." Another said: "We may all have to go to him to buy corn yet some day." We were taken out of that miserable inferno and again loaded on a freight train with many hundreds of other refugees from the south, and and (and put in twice) they started that freight train right up through the state of Indiana, and it stopped at every station and town and dropped off a number of refugees, according to the population of the town. We were dropped off in the little town of Shelbyville, at the mercy of the elements and the inhabitants of the town, who treated us very nicely. They first gave us all shelter in one empty warehouse with a dozen or two other families and all the people in the town and country around flocked to see us; all the necessities of life were heaped upon us and little homes and employment were soon provided for all of us. My brother graduated from the public school of that town at the age of 16 and became a printer. My sister graduated at 16 and taught school in and around Shelbyville for several years and then married a well-to-do Kansas farmer. My brother mastered his trade, married and moved to Indianapolis. I had lost my mother at the age of 10 and I went to live with my brother in Indianapolis and I, too, became a printer. During all those years my brother longed for his native land and the town of Decatur. So in 1884 he disposed of his interest in a printing establishment, and all his goods and chattels and moved to Decatur. A year later I followed him, intending to remain in Decatur or Atlanta, but failing to find a position there I returned to Indianapolis, where I remained a year and decided I would travel and see the

world, and I did, and enjoyd (sp) life and experienced many remarkable, hazardous and interesting experiences, I was married at the age of 24, became a widower at 30 and remained single and traveld (sp) for 20 years. In 1893 I visited Atlanta and Decatur. At that time my brother was living in Atlanta. He had graduated from the Georgia Medical college and became a doctor. Several years later he moved to Baltimore. The old age pension bureau advised me to write to you in quest of evidence of the date of my birth. If you will favor me with an answer, with or without evidence, I assure you I will appreciate it very much.

Yours truly, Walter Alonzo Sexton, 324 Hudson

street.

Source of letter:

<[https://www.ancestry.com/mediaui-viewer/tree/1583918/person/-476398893/media/3385fbda-0990-4e2a-9e6f-e141ec87eee5?\\_phsrc=rDM22462&\\_phstart=successSource](https://www.ancestry.com/mediaui-viewer/tree/1583918/person/-476398893/media/3385fbda-0990-4e2a-9e6f-e141ec87eee5?_phsrc=rDM22462&_phstart=successSource)>

Confirmation of residency 1860:

<[https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/7667/4212556\\_00176?pid=11193220&backurl=https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/ssc.dll?indiv%3D1%26dbid%3D7667%26h%3D11193220%26tid%3D%26pid%3D%26usePUB%3Dtrue%26\\_phsrc%3DrDM39200%26\\_phstart%3DsuccessSource&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&\\_phsrc=rDM39200&\\_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true](https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/7667/4212556_00176?pid=11193220&backurl=https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/ssc.dll?indiv%3D1%26dbid%3D7667%26h%3D11193220%26tid%3D%26pid%3D%26usePUB%3Dtrue%26_phsrc%3DrDM39200%26_phstart%3DsuccessSource&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=rDM39200&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true)>

## Civil War Tidbits

20 Jan 1864 - *Richland Shield & Banner*

*The Ohio State Journal* gives a full statement by Capt. Neil, of the taking of Neil's Battery in which one of our townsmen, lieut. A. B. Alger, was taken prisoner by the rebels. Besides him, a number of others were captured, and Corporal D. Altman was killed, after the most barbarous indignities were imposed on them. From Lieut. Alger they took \$250 in green backs, watch, overcoat, and all his valuables. The other men they stripped of their clothing, and marched them in that condition to Bristol, a distance of 60 miles.

20 Jan 1864 - *Richland Shield & Banner*

Sargeant Jacob Miller, company A, 64<sup>th</sup> regiment O. V. I. died in the hospital at Bridgeport, Ala., on the 9<sup>th</sup> of December, from sounds received at the battle of Mission Ridge. Mr. Miller was a citizen of Mansfield. He was a brave and excellent soldier, and cheerfully gave his life for this country.

03 Feb 1864 *Richland Shield & Banner*

A Card

The undersigned, on behalf of the members of Co F, 82d Regiment, O.V.I. hereby tender to the members of Co. A. 48<sup>th</sup> Battalion, O.V.M., and to the ladies and citizens of Mansfield, our thanks for the hearty welcome given us and sumptuous dinner prepared for us on our return home, last Saturday. Those noble men, Mr. James A. Niman, John Niman, B. Wolff, William Niman, E. Hoffer, William S. Burns and Theodore Dukes - in fact, all of the active members of Co. A, who exhibited such a noble disposition to welcome the returning boys, receive our most sincere thanks, and will ever be remembered by us and when we return to the field for duty we will cherish the memory of such kind friends at home. We would gladly name all the noble men and ladies who contributed to our reception, but space forbids: yet, be assured, you are all remembered. Our friend Matson will accept our hearty thanks for his welcoming words at the hall; they will never be forgotten. Our best wishes to you all.

Geo. R. Blackburn, Lieut. Commanding,  
Henry Harman, Acting Orderly

Continued on page 416