

Peter Bradt

Biographical Information written by Pat Hults

He was born with a restless spirit. His father might have characterized it less generously - maybe a feckless spirit. Peter preferred to think of it in a more positive light. Even if he'd wanted to follow in his father's farming footsteps, as the youngest of six sons, it was unlikely he'd inherit enough land to make a living. That was just fine with Peter. The never-ending rhythm of the farm - the milking, the haying, the planting, the harvesting, was just hard work to him. He didn't get the pleasure out of it his father and older brothers seemed to find. Peter wanted a little more excitement, a little more variety. He preferred playing music to bailing hay. When the chance to begin a shoemaking apprenticeship was offered in the mid-1830s, he grabbed it. Shoemakers went from house to house plying their trade - new people, new houses, new landscapes. After the seven years of the apprenticeship, he was eager to leave Schaghticoke. And he wanted to take his girl with him. They'd gotten married a couple of years before the end of his apprenticeship. He assumed she wanted to see more of the world, like he did - after all, she always nodded and seemed to listen when he talked of new places. But when it came down to it, she didn't want to leave home. Didn't want to leave the closeness of her family. She cried every time he brought it up. Peter was desperate to move on, to anywhere else. She wouldn't budge. They quietly parted ways. Luckily there were no children.

It didn't take Peter long to find another girl, this one with a more adventurous spirit. She was fifteen, he was twenty-one. Belinda was a dress maker; he was a shoemaker - it seemed like a good fit. They fit together well in other ways too and the children came right along. First it was Charles Sanford, two years after they married. Cornelia and Emma followed quickly. Then the shine started to wear off. They fit together in some ways, but not so much in others. They moved around New York restlessly, Schaghticoke, Lafayette, Otisco, Syracuse, and finally off to the Michigan frontier where their last son Charlie was born.

Peter hope [sic] Michigan would be more welcoming to shoemakers. He just had to have picked a trade that would go through profound changes during his lifetime. It was a reliable job when he started -- never a shortage of feet to be shod. But then those leather sewing machines became more and more available and the trade changed. Instead of going to a skilled craftsman (him), people began to buy mass produced shoes, which were so much cheaper. And the shoes were made in production with less skilled and lower paid workers in shops. Peter managed to make a living his whole life as a shoemaker, but it wasn't easy and it wasn't always secure.

His last son, Charles, seemed to have been born frail. He was always sickly and needing his mother. Rather than binding Peter and Belinda together, it seemed to widen the distance between them. Finally, one day in the early 1860s, he just left. He left

Belinda and his four children ages two to seventeen and drifted to Wisconsin, the next frontier.

It was an exciting time in Wisconsin. It had only been a state about ten years, people were pouring in and there was plenty of work. People came from the east coast and many German immigrants were flooding in. One of those, his Rosa, took his heart. They got married in March, 1861.

Peter and Rosa had only been married a month when the Civil War started. Wisconsin was a heavily federal state, solidly for the Union. There was strong sentiment for all able-bodied men to enlist. And although Peter was old in soldier standards, he was not immune to war fever. He resisted for a little while, not wanting to leave his young wife. Rosa conceived within six months of their marriage and their first child, Ellen Mariah, was born June 4, 1862. Rosa was eighteen at the time the birth; Peter forty-one.

Summer of 1862 saw an all-out recruitment effort in Wisconsin and other Union states.

“Drums beat, fifes play, bands parade the streets in full blast, gathering crowds at every corner and literally blocking the streets and crossings.’ That was they way one news man describe [sic] the atmosphere permeating Milwaukee during August 1862.

The city is one complete hive of busy men and boys...Play-cards garnish every blank wall...,recruiting officers jostle you at every turn...,flaming handbills setting forth the advantages of enlisting to this or that company meet the eye at every turn. Little boys run after and hail you...men already enlisted swarm around public places urging old comrades to join them.” [footnote: Beaudot, William J.K., The 24th Wisconsin Infantry in the Civil War: The biography of a regiment, Stackpole Books, Mechanicsburg, PA, 2003, pg. 21]

Peter’s restless nature couldn’t withstand the excitement of war and the generous enlistment bonuses also must have been a strong enticement. Much to Rosa’s objections, he enlisted August of 1862, leaving his very young wife and infant child behind. He enrolled as a private, but perhaps as a concession to his age, or because he was a damn good musician, his rank changed a month later to principal musician as a fifer.

A month after his enlistment the 24th regiment left Wisconsin on the 5th of September, heading toward Kentucky. By October 1st they had reached Chaplin Hills, Kentucky and on the 8th engaged in the battle at Perryville. It was a bloody fight, over 7,500 men were killed, wounded, or taken prisoner, although the 24th regiment itself lost only one man.

Peter found out being a musician had its share of danger. While he had plenty of musical duties at the camps such as calling his regiment to various tasks and playing at parades and concerts for the troops, and playing at funerals, he also played in the midst of fighting, the music urging on his fellow soldiers. The other side liked to pick off the musicians and quiet the music. And if he wasn’t playing music, he became a stretcher bearer, trying to retrieve wounded soldiers from the battlefield, or working with the field

doctors and nurses to treat the wounded - a grim task. Although Peter was not officially a fighting soldier, he saw plenty of it.

From Perryville they moved through Kentucky unto Tennessee through soaking rain, camping at night without tents. Rations had been cut for weeks because of supply problems. They arrived at Murfreesboro on December 30th, 1862 - the eve of the Stones River battle. They were cold, wet, and hungry. At Stones River forces from both north and south, some 83,000 men, wearily hunkered down for the night, the two sides only 700 feet apart and in some places closer. The night was a bitter end-of-year cold, rainy, and the men on both sides knew there was to be a major clash the next day. They huddled in their camps fighting the dread of anticipated conflict and the bone chilling cold.

The bands from both sides started playing songs to lift the men's spirits, sometimes trying to drown out the other side's band, sometimes playing back and forth. [see footnote] "The Confederate's "Bonny Blue Flag" was answered by "Hail, Columbia." "Yankee Doodle" echoed "Dixie." The 24th Wisconsin regiment band, certainly including Peter, played right along. Eventually the bands grew weary and there was left one brass band. It drifted into a melancholy rendition of "Home Sweet Home."

[footnote: The description of the battle of the bands comes from "Bands battle on the eve of Stones River clash. Murfreesboro Post, Mike West, managing Editor Writer, Dec. 26, 2006 <http://rutherfordhistory.org/bands-battled-on-eve-of-stones-river-clash>]

For one short, sweet moment in time, the bands from the two sides ceased their competition and joined in the bittersweet song. Soon soldiers from both sides began singing along.

To thee, I'll return, overburdened with care,
The heart's dearest solace will smile on me there.
No more from that cottage again will I roam,
Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home.

Later, when Peter would think back on his war experience, he wished it ended right there, with the chorus of voices and instruments, all longing for home. But it didn't. The next morning, one of the bloodier battles of the war occurred with 23,000 casualties from both sides. It started early for the 24th regiment with a morning Confederate attack. The Union soldiers were taken by surprise and suffered a great number of casualties and the taking of prisoners. Peter was one of them.

He was wounded and taken by the Confederates on the battlefield, then paroled the next day from the Confederate hospital. At this point in the war, both sides were engaged in prisoner exchanges and a system of paroling. A prisoner was granted parole status if he agreed to cease fighting until an official prisoner exchange could be arranged. He would be returned to this side and usually be assigned to a parole camp,

waiting for an exchange and return to his regiment. Or he could be given sick leave. One of Peter's records notes that from January to February, 1863 he was absent, sick, Nashville. Many wounded soldiers from Stones River ended up in one of Nashville's many battle hospitals. He finally made his way to Wisconsin, but was provided transportation back to St. Louis in April where he reported in at Benton Barracks on April 30th.

The 24th Wisconsin had pretty much stayed at or near Murfreesboro during the time Peter was gone. The end of May things began to change and the troops were told to be ready to march at any time. In June they finally started to move. It may be the beginning of another trek toward war was too much for Peter. He was an old man as far as warfare went, he'd suffered on the long march to Murfreesboro and then injured with a long recovery. What he had seen at Stones River may have haunted him. The prospect of more marching, of more bloody fighting, was too much, particularly with the pull of his pretty, young wife. His name started appearing as absent without leave on the muster rolls. On August 17th he was arrested in Milwaukee and returned south to Louisville, Kentucky. The man who arrested him received \$10 for turning him in. Peter was disgusted, he would have paid him \$20 to leave him alone. After that, Peter disappeared. He, his pregnant wife and young daughter left for Canada where his next child was born. In March of 1864 he was classified as a deserter.

The 24th Wisconsin did indeed march into fierce battle again after Peter left, fighting at Chattanooga, Resaca, Kennesaw Mountain, Jonesboro, the siege of Atlanta, the Battle of Franklin and finally in the Battle of Nashville. By the end of the war the regiment that had started with around 1,000 men had lost about 200 to battle or disease, 183 disabled, 162 had been taken prisoner of war, and 71 men were listed as deserters. [see footnote below] So, Peter was not alone in his regiment in his decision to end his war unofficially. Some men were able to go through carnage and manage to do it again and again. Some men who experienced the blood and bodies torn apart began to see it as madness or a waste of good men or at least a waste of their own life. Peter was one of those.

[footnote: Wisconsin Genealogical Trails, Wisconsin Civil War Regiments, 24th Wisconsin Infantry Regiment, <http://genealogytrails.com/wis/military/cw/24thWIInfReg.html>]

Resources Other Than Those Footnoted

Historical Essay: Perryville, Battle of Civil War Battle Summary
<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS2561>

Military Service Records for Peter Bradt, U.S. National Archives and records Administration

Staff members at Stones River National Battlefield

Third Supplement to Descendants of Albert and Arent Andriessse Bradt, including Van Deerzee, Laurene Matthews Grimes, Higginson Book Co., 2007

Wisconsin in the Civil War- Wisconsin Historical Society

<https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/quiner/id/16582>

Facts and Speculation

What's true and what is speculation

Peter was born in Schaghticoke, NY Nov. 23, 1830, of his 9 siblings, he was the youngest of 6 sons.

Peter was a shoemaker. Whether he had an apprenticeship is a guess, but that was the way most shoemakers were trained at the time.

Peter was married at least twice, to Belinda and to Rosa. Family lore from the Wisconsin crew, as reported in the Third Supplement to Descendants of Albert and Arent Andriessse Bradt, says he was married once before Belinda.

Peter had at least 16 children, 5 with Belinda and 11 with Rosa.

The towns listed as residences come from US census entries.

Peter and Belinda's last child, Charles, is listed in the 1880 census as age 21 and suffering from disease of the liver. He died the next year.

Vital records in Michigan began in the 1860s, but have many gaps, especially early in the decade. There are not records, so far, of Peter and Belinda's divorce. Peter's marriage to Rosa in Wisconsin is documented

Peter's enlistment and subsequent reclassification as principal musician is recorded in regimental documentation.

The Battle of the Bands was an actual event that took place the night before the Stones River battle. While the actual participants are not documented, Peter was there and he was a musician in the regimental band.

Military records provided by NARA document Peter's capture, parole, classification of "sick", his arrest in Milwaukee, his disappearance and final status as deserter.

Peter and Rosa's son George Washington Bradt was born April 25, 1864 in Ontario, Canada. The next child, George Henry, was born two years later in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Peter and Rosa remained in Wisconsin until Peter's death in 1897, but moved from Milwaukee to a series of small Wisconsin towns north of Milwaukee. Peter opened at least two shoe making stores in these small towns.

