Introduction

In the summer of 1999, my husband Don and I and our two sons—nine-year-old Ryan and seven-year-old Adam—headed to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania on a hot, azure-skied day. Although Underground Railroad and Civil War history had long fascinated me, none of us had ever visited a battlefield. Since that time, we've trekked plenty of them—including about fifteen return visits to Gettysburg (we've lost count!)—but none contained the anticipation and awe inherent in that first trip as we traveled six hours from flat Ohio to the hills of Pennsylvania with mountains in view.

We laughed at Elephant Ed signs that advertised a combination elephant museum–chocolate shop (although we later came to appreciate the sweet delicacies nestled within) and marveled at establishments located high upon the winding hills, wondering with our northern Ohio minds how people got to them in snowy winter. When we finally arrived, already amazed by the monuments visible in the distance, the boys begged to be kitted out in soldier gear. Once accomplished, they marched proudly up Little Round Top, scampered around the imposing igneous rock of Devil's Den, and trudged across the once bloodstained Wheatfield. Then, when hunger struck and we could no longer ignore its pangs, we filed into General Pickett's Buffet, piling up plates with hot, filling food and returning for second rounds.

What I know now but didn't know then: we were chowing down in a restaurant located on the grounds where twenty-one-year-old Captain Wells Waite Miller of the 8th Ohio Volunteer Infantry nearly died from his wounds. This happened while fighting for the Union during Longstreet's Assault—also known as Pickett's Charge or the Pickett-Pettigrew-Trimble Assault among other names—on July 3, 1863.

At that time, of course, I had absolutely no idea who Wells Waite Miller even was—and I wasn't likely to read about him in history books. After serving his country with distinction and valor, he faded from living memory, becoming just one of many forgotten Civil War heroes.

Although I'd long planned to conduct deep-dive research on one such forgotten man, it took until 2018 before I randomly picked a unit, doing so because I vaguely remembered a Gettysburg monument set off from the rest. Once I learned the monument's affiliation—the 8th OVI—I could finally whittle down possibilities to choose my subject.

Upon arriving home from our 2018 Gettysburg trip, I located and scanned *A Military History of the 8th Regiment Ohio Vol. Inf'y: Its Battles, Marches, and Army Movements* and *The Eighth Ohio at Gettysburg* by Franklin Sawyer. The author of these publications commanded the unit with increasing levels of authority and responsibility as war waged.

Then I read the following line: "Some of the wounded, and among them Capt. Miller, say the passing rebels came so close they expected to be trampled into the earth."[i] That's all it took for me to decide to research "Capt. Miller." At this point, I didn't know anything about his life, including his first name, where he was from, or whether his tale would prove to be interesting.

Fortunately, I (randomly!) chose well with Wells living a captivating life before, during, and after the Civil War: a student in Oberlin during a tumultuous time in history; courageous soldier; briefly, a teacher; highly respected agriculturist; revered member of his community; dedicated, trusted politician; and a son, brother, husband, father, and grandfather.

Plus, people far more knowledgeable than I am about specific units at Gettysburg applauded my choice to highlight the 8th OVI's contributions to the battle. The regiment's unique role has become increasingly more apparent over the past few decades as historians have delved more deeply and found forgotten documents. As *America's Civil War* puts it in "Sawyer's

Gettysburg Charge," the 8th OVI's "awe-inducing story had somehow slipped through the cracks of history." But, because of their incredibly brave actions when about 150 of them faced down 6,000 Rebels—about ten percent of them quite close up, indeed—"the men of Ohio could forever hold their heads high."[ii]

I can't take credit for deliberately focusing upon someone from this deserving unit—or even for knowing about the ascending appreciation of the 8th OVI before I began my research—but I sure am glad about the synchronicity.

Two years later, when I finally tracked down a photo of Wells—one when he was already in his fifties—people who assumed that I was writing about an ancestor pointed out how much he looked like my father, Thomas. And he did—despite no known biological connection. How ironic, then, that so many of Wells' direct ancestors were named Thomas on both his maternal and paternal side—and that both my father and Wells couldn't seem to belong to an organization without becoming its longtime chairperson or secretary.

After I began blogging about my research, various descendants of Wells periodically reached out to me (and then vice versa), and we quickly seemed to feel comfortable with one another, corresponding or chatting like old friends. Plus, Wells and I share plenty of important dates and milestones—with one of them, discussed at the book's end, being too chilling for me to easily dismiss.

Now, after several years of research and blogging on the subject at kbsagert.com/blog, I'm ready to present what I know about Wells' life and times in book form, aware that I couldn't possibly do it full justice, and that people, including me, will continue to uncover new information.

I'm only including the amount of history that feels necessary as context for the story—although, admittedly, I meander off the beaten path when information feels too enlightening or too interconnected to pass by without comment.

---

[i] Franklin Sawyer. *The Eighth Ohio at Gettysburg*. Washington, D.C.: Regimental Association, E.J. Gray. 1889.
[ii] Robert L. Bateman. "Sawyer's Gettysburg Charge." *America's Civil War*. July 2004, pp. 38-44, 72.