

# Connections between the Civil War, Caryville, TN, and the Hope Diamond, part 2

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on August 10, 2015)

Fred Eiler brought us the introduction to the Frederick Alfonso de Tavernier, Baron de Becu story last week. He told us about Frederick's marriage to Susan Carey, the daughter of Judge William Carey. Caryville, TN, just to our north, is named for him.

Born in Prussia about 1835 to an aristocratic French family, Frederick came to the United States to fight in the Civil War, hoping to join the Confederacy, but as fate would have it, he actually joined the Union Army. When Fred's tale stopped last time Frederick was in charge of the 5<sup>th</sup> US Colored Cavalry.

So, let's pick up with part two of Fred's story:

...

The 5th USCC participated in the first Battle of Saltville on Oct 1-3 of 1864, as part of the Union forces under the command of General Stephen Gano Burbridge. Despite valiant attempts to break through Confederate lines, the cavalry was repeatedly repulsed.

The battle became a defeat for the Union forces and in the ensuing hours after its finish, a scene of criminal violence, as Union injured, notably members of the 5th USCC, were murdered in their hospital beds by Confederate partisans. Chief among the partisans was Champ Ferguson, who was arrested after the war ended, tried for the murders in Nashville, convicted and became one of the only two men executed for war crimes committed during the Civil War. (The other being George Wirz, the commander of Camp Sumter, the Confederate prisoner of war camp near Andersonville, Georgia.)

Members of the 5th USCC also suffered a disastrous defeat on January 23, 1865, when about 80 members were wrangling a herd of cattle from Camp Nelson, Kentucky to Louisville when they were attacked by Confederate guerillas. Local citizens found 15 dead and 20 wounded soldiers after the attack.

We don't know the exact date of Frederick de Tavernier's separation from the military, but at some point during 1865 he achieved the rank of Colonel. He must have made a commitment to Susan Carey during the War, because he had returned to Campbell County, where they were married on December 5, 1865.

Susan's father, Judge William Carey, and two of her brothers died during the war. Susan and her mother were responsible for a vast estate, both inherited and acquired by the late Judge Carey.

Sue's mother, Melinda Emily Wheeler Carey was the daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Wheeler. He was one of the three Wheeler brothers who came from Virginia as Campbell County was formed in 1806 and settled in Walnut Grove, later to be called Wheeler's Station, then, in 1866, Caryville. William Carey and Melinda Emily Wheeler were married in 1831.

William's first job was delivering mail on horseback. Soon he owned 11,000 acres of land and was a clerk in the land office. He and his father-in-law, Thomas Wheeler became partners in a freight line, delivering passengers and goods from the railroad terminus at Wheeler's Station to Middlesboro, KY. William also served as County Judge.

The Hotel Carey was located on land that was called the Free Soil Farm. The Wheelers had freed their slaves before the Civil War and donated about 1,000 acres of their land to the Free Soil Farm for them to live on and form a farming community.

By the 1870 census, Frederick was listed as owner of the property, with his wife Sue. The value of the real estate was listed as \$8,000, and the personal property at \$3,000. And also listed was an item probably of even greater value to the de Taverniers; a daughter, Anna, three years of age. Three unrelated adults were also listed with the family, probably employees of the hotel or other businesses.

# Connections between the Civil War, Caryville, TN, and the Hope Diamond, part 2

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on August 10, 2015)

The 1880 census still finds Fred and Sue de Tavernier in Caryville. Their daughter Anna is now 13, and a 22 year-old cook in the hotel is living with them. What the census does not tell us is that a son and heir was born to the couple in 1876.

He is not on the census because he was buried in the Carey Cemetery in 1877 under the name of "Our Little Oscar, Aged 14 Mos." He is listed under some Campbell County cemetery records as a Carey, but he was the only son and heir of Frederick and Susan Carey de Tavernier. He is said to have died when a family servant who was carrying him fell into a well on the Free Soil Farm.

In the early 1880's Frederick entered federal government service as a postal employee at Knoxville and Susan was named postmistress at Caryville. During this same period they welcomed another daughter into the family. She was named Marguerite Valesca de Tavernier, and called "Val."

In 1883 the Colonel's Civil War service qualified him for the position of federal postal inspector at Chattanooga. The family left the Free Soil Farm with its happy and sad memories for a new life in Chattanooga.

In the Carey Cemetery in Caryville they left the grave of their precious Oscar, plus those of Susan's father, Judge William Carey, her grandparents, Thomas and Elizabeth Wheeler and her brother Philip Carey, who, like her father, died during the Civil War, as well as her brother, William, who died in 1872. The family cemetery also contained the graves of her sisters Martha J. Carey Hart (d. 1866) and Melinda Bennett (d. 1883), who had married Dr. Addison Guthrie, as well as Frank W. Wheeler (1820 - 1842/3).

In Chattanooga, the family of Frederick de Tavernier settled into a house at the corner of Walnut and Sixth Streets, opposite the Bijou. In addition to his position as federal postal inspector, Frederick was active in politics.

He was a charter member of the Central YMCA and a member of the Hamilton County Court. In this position he served on the original commission which supervised the construction of the Walnut Street Bridge over the Tennessee River and the new courthouse.

Although Frederick had been elected to political office in Campbell County, his attempt in Hamilton County was unsuccessful. However, as owner of the Central Hotel in Chattanooga, he was influential in local politics and considered an important figure as host and owner of the hotel. He was living in apartments on the top floor of the hotel when he became ill in the fall of 1891 and Sue applied for an invalid's Civil War pension.

When he died that November, 1891, he was buried in the National Cemetery in Chattanooga, and Sue then applied for a widow's pension. Their daughter, Marguerite Valesca, married William Arthur Holder in 1897, and they lived on the family farm in Tyner until it became the site of the of an ammunition plant in 1941.

On the 1900 census, Susan was listed as the widowed head of the de Tavernier household, along with her unmarried daughter Anna. A child of six, Fredericka, was also listed as her daughter, with her unlisted father as having been born in Prussia, but since the baron had died three years before her birth, he couldn't have been the father, and Susan would have been too old to have been the mother.

It seems more likely that she would have been Anna's child, perhaps adopted by her grandmother. Anna de Tavernier died in 1906 and was buried in the family plot. Susan Carey de Tavernier was also buried there at her death in 1910.

Because of these two tombstones marked de Tavernier, the little cemetery is often referred to as the "De Tavernier Cemetery," but is officially the "Holder Cemetery," now near the Volkswagen plant.

# Connections between the Civil War, Caryville, TN, and the Hope Diamond, part 2

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on August 10, 2015)

We don't even know who Frederick de Tarvernier's parents were, but family legend say he was related to Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, the 17th Century world traveler and jewel merchant. He sold the 116 carat Tavernier blue diamond to Louis XIV, King of France, in 1668 for 120,000 livres, the equivalent of 172,000 ounces of pure gold.

Louis had the stone cut into the 68 carat French Blue, and his grandson Louis XV had it reset into the Medal of the Order of the Gold Fleece. It disappeared in 1792 during the French Revolution, was recut and re-emerged in London some 30 years later as the Hope Diamond.

In 1669, Jean-Baptiste purchased the Seigneury of Aubonne, near Geneva, Switzerland, for 60,000 livres. The Barony of Becu, in Frederick de Tavernier's title, was located between Besancon, in the east of France, and Switzerland.

Although the Baron's line disappeared with the death of his sole son and heir, "Little Oscar," in the well in Careyville, his memory lived on in the families of his daughters. He will always be the "prince on a white horse" who returned after the war to rescue Sue and her widowed mother from the dangers of the Reconstruction South. Far from the royal courts of Prussia and Britain, he influenced the government and economy in his adopted country.

...

Thank you Fred for another tremendous local story of intrigue and suspense filled with humor and unique individuals, even royalty!



"Our Little Oscar, Aged 14 Mos." Tombstone located in the Carey Cemetery

## Connections between the Civil War, Caryville, TN, and the Hope Diamond, part 2

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on August 10, 2015)



Tombstone located in the Chattanooga National Cemetery "Fred DeTavernier, Col US Army, 13 Nov 1891"



Sue E. DeTavernier is buried in the DeTavernier/Holder Cemetery at Tyner, TN, near the Volkswagen Plant