

Connections between the Civil War, Caryville, TN, and the Hope Diamond, part 1

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on August 3, 2015)

Fred Eiler brings us another of his stories about East Tennessee. This time he goes back to France and connects a Baron to East Tennessee's Caryville, a neighboring city to our north. Caryville was named in 1866 for Judge William Carey, mentioned in Fred's story. Before 1866 the site had been known as Wheeler's Station, for H. D. Wheeler, one of the first settlers there and owner of the land as well as proprietor of one of the earliest stores. Wheeler was also the Grandfather of Sue Carey, also mentioned in Fred's story as the subject of the love story he relates.

Enjoy Fred's story in two parts. Here is part 1:

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If you arrived at the terminus of the railroad from Knoxville in Caryville during the years just after the Civil War and decided to visit the Hotel Carey, you might have been greeted by an elegant gentleman with the words, "I am Frederick Alfonso de Tavernier, Baron de Becu, and I'll be your server today." If you were a local in this southwest corner of Campbell County, you would already know that this handsome aristocrat first arrived here as an officer with the Union Army during the Civil War, when the town was still called Wheeler's Station.

It was probably at this very hotel that he first met Susan, the daughter of the owner and former county official Judge William Carey. Throughout the rest of his life, the Baron insisted that he fell in love at first sight with the beautiful Sue Carey. I learned of this love story from the book "Caryville and More," published in 1987 by fellow Anderson County teacher Marshall L. McGhee, along with Melba Jackson.

Frederick de Tavernier, when asked what brought him to Caryville, might have explained how he was passing through during the late war and had fallen in love. He might have added that his last name, Tavernier, meant innkeeper in French, so it was his natural calling. He probably wouldn't have had time to relate the storybook events of his life before the meal arrived from the kitchen or the guests were shown to their rooms.

The Baron was born in Prussia about 1835 to one of the aristocratic French families scattered throughout Europe by the Revolution in France and the remains of Napoleon's Empire. He won the attention of the Prussian Court by his charm and military accomplishments.

His position was so high that when King William's son, Crown Prince Frederick went to England in 1858 to marry Queen Victoria's daughter, also named Victoria, Frederick de Tavernier, Baron de Becu, accompanied him and served as best man. The Baron lingered in the splendor of the court of the world's greatest empire until he and several friends decided to go to America and fight for the romantic, underdog Confederacy.

Upon arrival in New York, the naïve aristocrats probably declared their plan to join the Army of the South to the authorities and were immediately arrested. Although the South was hoped to be the winner of the conflict by most European countries because of financial reasons, slavery was looked down upon by these same societies.

It was probably not too difficult to convince Frederick to change his loyalty and join the Union Army, especially when the alternative would have been prison. Although he joined as a private, his Prussian military training, considered the best in the world, allowed him to advance to the rank of colonel by the end of the war.

Military records tell us that de Tavernier enlisted on April 23, 1861 and served for New York. His residence is listed as Snicker's Gap, Virginia, the scene of a battle in the latter part of the War. He was promoted to Full 1st Lieutenant in Company F, New York 7th Infantry Regiment on November 2, 1862, and to Full Captain on December 18, 1862. He was mustered out on May 8, 1863 at NY, NY.

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And now the Campbell County connection. On September 5, 1863, he enlisted as a Captain in Company F, Illinois 16th Cavalry Regiment. This aristocrat who had last lived in the royal courts of Prussia, then Great Britain, was listed as from Missouri. He was promoted to Full Major on September 8, 1863.

I read in "The Wilderness Road" by Robert L. Kincaid that the 16th Illinois Cavalry was assigned to protect the Union foraging trains that were, like those of the Confederacy, stripping the Powell Valley to supply the forces battling to control the Cumberland Gap, the gateway to the South. We don't know exactly where or when de Tavernier was assigned, but on January 2, 1864, Major C.H. Beers led a battalion of the 16th Illinois Cavalry on a foraging expedition up the Powell Valley to Jonesville, Virginia.

Because the confederates were not expected to be out in the six degrees below zero weather, he did not post a guard on the Sticklebyville Road. "The resourceful Confederate commander in southwest Virginia, General William E. Jones, had been waiting for just such an opportunity.

Moving out of his encampment in the Powell Valley hills in the middle of the night, he had caught Beers and his men off guard at daybreak on Sunday morning the 3rd. A converging column under Colonel A. L. Pridemore galloped in from the east. Completely surrounded and outnumbered, the Union men took refuge on a hill northwest of the town and fought valiantly throughout the day.

In the late afternoon the Confederates charged their trapped foe and forced them to surrender. They rounded up Major Beers and 383 of his men, three pieces of light artillery and twenty seven six-mule teams. It was a cheerful victory for the Confederates, in spite of the fact that one man froze to death in his saddle and many suffered frozen feet."

The final chapter of the Baron's Union Army career is even more complicated. Should you visit the African American Civil War Memorial in Washington, D.C., you will find on plaque A-12, the name Frederick de Tavernier. Could there have been a black American with this same name who served in the Union forces? No, this is our Baron de Becu.

Apparently, at the end of the war he was attached as a white officer to the 5th Regiment of the U. S. Colored Cavalry. The record shows that he mustered in at Louisville, Kentucky, May 8, 1865, with the rank of Major.

This outfit, also, saw action on the Wilderness Road. The 5th US Colored Cavalry was one of the more notable black fighting units and it was officially organized, after its first two battles, in Kentucky in 1864. It was commanded by Colonel James Brisbin until February, 1865, when he took over the 6th US Colored Cavalry. His executive officer, Louis Henry Carpenter, then commanded the regiment until March 20, 1866.

The regiment was composed of ex-slaves, freedmen and slaves. Many white officers from the unit were later assigned to the famed Buffalo Soldiers cavalry units. Many former USCC soldiers (later called troopers) volunteered for further service after their Civil War units were retired.

The first engagement of the 5th USCC took place on October 2, 1864 in and around the salt works of Saltville, Virginia. Colonel James F. Wade had been placed temporarily in charge of the unit with orders to join Burbridge in Kentucky. In his haste to create the unit, Wade mounted 600 men on untrained horses armed with Enfield infantry rifles, impossible to load on horseback. In comparison, the troops of the 11th Michigan and the 12th Ohio Cavalries were armed with Spencer repeating carbines, which were wholly effective from horseback.

General Burbridge had been ordered by General Grant to proceed into southwest Virginia and destroy the salt works at Saltville. The 5th USCC, therefore, was attached to Colonel Brisbin's forces and joined

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Burbridge in Prestonburg, Kentucky. Burbridge left Prestonburg on September 27, 1864, to march toward Saltville.

The black troops were an object of much ridicule, The soldiers were also directing their malice at the black soldiers in the form of petty theft, such as having their hats pulled off, or having their horses stolen.

Yet the black soldiers never complained or retaliated against the white racism.

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Hold that thought! Fred will be back with the rest of the Fredrick story AND the connection to the Hope Diamond in the next installment of Historically Speaking!



The Historic Carey Cemetery located at the corner of Bruce Gap Road and Lawson Lane in Caryville, TN



Fred Eiler standing beside William Carey's grave and monument for whom the town of Caryville, TN, is named