

A History Unearthed

A minie ball in the vicinity of Civil War battlefields is a common enough find, but near an old cellar hole in Clarendon is something else entirely. Thirteen year old Aidan Botti of Wallingford working under the tutelage of Phil Mandolare (aka Mud Dog Mandy) unearthed a dropped (not fired) minie ball in the vicinity of the Jeremiah Keiley homestead on East Street.

Typically any mention of minie balls is in association with the Civil War but the one found at the Keiley homestead pre-dated the Civil War. It was a higher caliber version which would have been made for older model muskets that were converted to use the minie ball in the Mexican American War (1846-1848). Newer models produced in the 1850's and 1860's that were used in the Civil War used a smaller caliber minie ball.

Jeremiah Keiley (1828-1916) arrived in the US from Ireland in 1845. By 1850 he was living in Rutland working as a laborer. In 1860 he is found in Shrewsbury married to Mary McCormick, another Irish immigrant and their first two children. In 1863 he was in Clarendon when he registered for the draft, though he did not serve in the Civil War. There is not anything to specifically link the minie ball to him.

It was Jeremiah's next door neighbor Henry Hunter Crossman who might have owned the minie ball. There is no definitive proof that the minie ball belonged to Henry, but it is a best guess based on a review of Jeremiah's neighbors and of Henry's specific military experience.

Henry Hunter Crossman

Henry was born Dec. 8, 1823 in Clarendon, the third generation of his family in town. The Crossman family's roots in Clarendon began in 1781 with the arrival of Henry's grandfather William Crossman (1751-1837). William was a Revolutionary War veteran from Easton, Massachusetts who had served in Massachusetts in 1776 and then again in Vermont in 1781.

Henry was also a military veteran, having served in the Mexican American War. His service took a tragic turn when he lost an arm at age 23 in the Battle of Chapultepec Sept. 12, 1847. He returned to Clarendon and supported himself as a farmer. It cannot have been easy with such a grievous injury. Why bring a minie ball home from the war? Perhaps as a reminder of what had cost him his arm.

In 1850 we find his household consisting of himself and his widowed mother Olive (Lyon) Crossman (1787-1879). They were living next door to his older brother William (1819-1862). Henry married for the first time Feb. 17, 1858 to Mary Ann Howard (1836-1886). She was the daughter of Romulous and Fanny (Burgess) Howard. The first of their 11 children was Lucy Jane (1859-1885).

In addition to his mother Olive, wife Mary Ann and daughter Lucy Jane, the household in 1860 also included a servant, 17 year old Mary Kennedy from Ireland. Mary Ann divorced Henry for "intolerable severity" around the time of the birth of twins Charles John Howard (1861-1936) and Joseph H. (1861-

1864). Joseph died of dysentery. On April 9, 1852, approximately a year after the divorce, Henry and Mary Ann remarried.

By the time of the 1870 census the household had expanded to include daughter Mary (1864-1893), son Henry Wallace (1866-1947), son William H. (1867-1946), and daughter Eva J. (1868-1892). Son Lyman (1870-1925) came shortly thereafter followed by son Frank (1873-1874) who died of brain fever at 11 months. Tragedy again came when daughter Susan E. (1874-1875) died at age 5 weeks. Lastly came daughter Anna Dickinson (1876-1949).

Henry died Oct. 17, 1877. As was reported in the Rutland Herald:

“The mysterious disappearance of Henry H. Crossman of Clarendon, has been explained. His body was discovered on Thursday afternoon, November 29th, in the woods. There were no signs of violence. About two rods distant from the body the searching party found the dead man’s hat and a three gallon can nearly half full of rum. He leaves a wife and seven children. “

The cause of death recorded by Town Clerk Edwin Congdon was *“Over dose of whiskey or in drunken fit”*.

From this distant point in time we can surmise that life was not easy for Henry and that perhaps he bore more than just physical wounds from the war. The loss of his arm in the Mexican American War was no doubt a pivotal point in his life and , perhaps that minie ball held real meaning for him.

In the 1880 census we find Mary Ann with children William, Eva, Lyman, and Anna . She died in 1886 at age 50 of consumption. Mary Ann and Henry are buried in the East Clarendon Cemetery.