Civil War Veterans Resting At Old Village Cemetery (Part 2)

William H. Bigham, 46, enlisted in the Union Army on August 26, 1861. He was among the first 75 recruits to enlist in the 5th Michigan Infantry Regiment Co. I, being formed by Captain John Gilluly of Brighton. The 5th mustered into service on August 27, 1861 for a period of three years. At the time, it was considered unlikely the war would last that long. Since all the recruits came from Livingston County. Company I was known as the Livingston Company and the Livingston Volunteers.

On September 11, 1861, the Regiment received its regimental flag at Fort Wayne in Detroit and boarded the Ocean for Cleveland. They then... took the cars for Pittsburgh... arriving at... on September 12th, where they changed cars arriving in Washington on September 14, 1861. After receiving... in different Springfield muskets... they bivouacked in Arlington, Virginia. On September 22nd, Co. I advanced several miles nearer the front where they "heard the crack of hostile rifles and the dread whisperings of passing bullets."

Felling timers and constructing earthworks, the winter was spent in tents in "Camp Michigan." April 5, 1862 marked the beginning of the siege of Yorktown; the enemy being defeated after four weeks. Heading to Williamsburg on May 5th, they struggled through rain and mud where the "...thunder of artillery and continual roar of volleys..." made obvious the war was ahead. Here Captain Gilluly and Co. I lost 26 men killed, wounded and missing.

Bigham participated in the battles of Glendale (June 30, 1862), Malvern Hill (July 1, 1862), Second Manassas (August 30, 1862) and Chantilly (September 1, 1862), among others. He was discharged for disability on September 24, 1862, at which time he returned to Brighton.

William H. Bigham, born in Pennsylvania in 1816, was the oldest of two sons of Robert Bigham Sr., who was born in Ireland in 1789, emigrated to the United States and established himself in Vermont. It appears Robert Sr., kept heading west as his second son, Robert Jr., was born in Ohio in 1828.

Robert Jr. arrived in the Brighton area in 1833 with his wife, Hannah. Together, they built a two-story log house on the southwest corner of the Grand River Trail and Chaliss Road. Call and C, the original name of their tavern, was later called the Bigham House. Many land seekers heading west were glad to see the stopping place, it being the first beyond Powers' tavern at Grand River Trail and Spencer Road.

Bigham ("Uncle Robert") is reputed to have helped many pioneers asking information as to the location of good land for settling. He sold farming equipment including plows and ox yokes. At one time, he owned the Eastern House on the northeast corner of Grand River Trail and Main Street.

In the 1870 census, William is living at his father's hotel, and his occupation is a mason. Although 55 years old, he likely found employment in the area. The 1880 census has him living in the household of sister-in-law Malinda (Robert Jr.'s wife), and her family. Malinda appears to be managing the Brighton House for J.C. Case. William H. Bigham died April 26, 1881. His brother, Robert Jr., had died a month earlier.

Five volunteers from the BAS, Rolling Thunder and the community had a gorgeous sunny day as they completed the much-needed beautification of this 1837 burial ground. The bank along the waterfront received transplanted day lilies and irises of the valley. These perennial plantings will reinforce the bank and minimize any erosion of sediments into the millpond. Weed trees on the bank and a downed tree in the millpond were removed through hard work and great effort. Small burning bush shrubs were planted on the bank and will provide brilliant orange-red color in the fall as they mature.

Leaves were raked throughout the headstone area, while other workers clipped shoots of trees removed in earlier years. These materials filled 80 large composting bags.

The headstones lying in the grass were freed of encroaching sod around the edges.

The cemetery gates are open 9am-3pm. Please visit this distinguished site as over 35 veterans of the Civil War and other U.S. wars are buried here. You will be amazed at the natural beauty found within these grounds.

Not surprisingly, few people from Brighton have visited this cemetery as it has been locked for the past two decades, and only been open to the public in the last year. Old Village Cemetery is definitely another downtown jewel. Enter through the new gate located above the gazebo next to St Paul Episcopal Church for a view that is truly unique!

Jim Vichich

Members of Rolling Thunder work to winch a fallen tree from the millpond.

Brighton's oldest burial round, Old Village Cemetery, has the most natural beauty of any of Brighton's cemeteries. Situated on a hill at the edge of the millpond, you can observe the sun glistening on the sparkling water. The canopy of mature hardwoods and conifers creates an opening that allows visitors to experience a complete view of downtown.

The Third Annual Spring Cleanup was a tremendous success on Saturday, May 7th. Fifty volunteers from the BAS, Rolling Thunder and the community had a gorgeous sunny day as they completed the much-needed beautification of this 1837 burial ground.

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