

TURNPIKE TALES

by Jim Ford

"TURNPIKE TALES" #24

(Historical items from the "Madison Bouckville Antique Week" region)

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The Madison-Bouckville area has been rich in history from the arrival of the first settlers to the present day. As an addition to the website, we have decided to share some of that history in order that the patrons who travel to the Madison-Bouckville Show will have a better understanding of our truly unique region.

Aaron T. Bliss – Civil War Veteran And Governor

Aaron Bliss was born in the Town of Smithfield on May 22, 1837 and received his early education at that place. As a youth, he found work in the Stone Store at Bouckville (today's Landmark Tavern) and clerked there from 1854 to 1861. In that year the country was swept by the Civil War and Bliss enlisted on October 1, 1861 as a private in Company D, 10th New York Cavalry at the age of 24. He was so well liked that he was elected a Lieutenant, and a year later was promoted to Captain.

Bliss saw active service for three years and five months, and then was taken prisoner at Ream's Station, Virginia. For six months he was held, first at Salisbury, North Carolina, then at the infamous Andersonville Prison in Georgia. He was then moved from Andersonville and held at Macon, Georgia, as well as Charleston and Columbia, South Carolina.

Bliss managed to escape from the Confederate prison at Columbia on November 29, 1864. He learned to avoid the roads and kept to the swamps, keeping hidden by day and traveling by night. There was little to eat.

When Captain Bliss reached the Union lines on December 16, a long 17 days after his escape, he was emaciated and starving.

When the war was over, Bliss became interested in the lumber business and subsequently moved to Saginaw, Michigan. He decided to make that place his home. Mr. Bliss briefly returned to Madison County in 1868 to marry Miss Allaseba M. Phelps, the daughter of Ambrose Phelps, of Solsville. He had known his bride when he was clerking in the Bouckville store. They were married at her parents' home in Solsville on March 31, 1868.

On his return to Michigan with his new wife, Bliss became interested in Republican politics. He became a City Alderman and then a County Supervisor. Later he was elected to the Michigan State Senate and from 1889-1891 was a representative to Congress from the 8th District of the State of Michigan.

Bliss was elected Governor of the State of Michigan in 1900 and re-elected in 1902. The Governor and his wife were frequent visitors to Madison County where their families lived. They returned home for the holiday in 1902 and met with old friends in Bouckville and Solsville. Mr. Bliss even called on J.P. Tooke, his old schoolmaster.

On September 16th of 1906, Aaron Bliss passed away. He was buried at Forest Lawn Cemetery, in Saginaw, Michigan.

(Editor's note: In the Bouckville Methodist-Episcopal Church there is a plaque which was commissioned by Governor Bliss to honor his fellow soldiers from the Bouckville area and was presented in March of 1907. Governor Bliss had intended to be at the presentation ceremony but passed away in 1906.)

Credit: George W. Walter – Article from his works entitled Chips and Shavings.

THE BLISS PLAQUE –

Here is the wording on the plaque at the Methodist Church in Bouckville:

IN THIS MEETING HOUSE THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS OF COMPANY D, TENTH NEW YORK VOLUNTEER CAVALRY WERE SWORN INTO THE SERVICE OF THE UNITED STATES OCTOBER ELEVENTH 1861 FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE UNION:

Joseph F. Ashtenaw	Augustus I. Eldridge	Henry M. McElroy
Walter Bell	Robert Evans	William Ryan
Daniel W. Belton	John W. Fletcher	Mortimer Spring
Aaron T. Bliss	Hiram Hadden	Calvin Stevens
Jacob R. Brodock	Leonard Hanawall	Richard L. Tuke
David R. Davis	Eli Laird	Liba Z. Washburn
Charles Eastman	Isaac Manchester	Ebenezer S. White
John A. Edson	Thomas McElligott	William W. Williams

LATER, THESE WERE JOINED BY THE FOLLOWING MEN FROM BOUCKVILLE AND NEARBY:

James K. Carter, Henry C. Clark, Josiah Edwards,
Elias D. Evans, Kelsey H. Fox, Cyrus D. Howard
Lorenzo Lewis, John H. McQuien, Wesley W. Tackabury
Charles H. Underwood, David Williams

THIS TABLET WAS ERECTED OCTOBER ELEVENTH, 1906, BY
COMRADE AARON T. BLISS, CAPTAIN

(Editor's note: The plaque can be seen at the Bouckville Methodist Church. It is proudly displayed as an important part of the history of that church.)