

TURNPIKE TALES

by Jim Ford

"TURNPIKE TALES" #36

(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 newsletter, 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.

ISAAC FORD – PRISONER AT ANDERSONVILLE AND FLORENCE

Isaac Centre Ford was born on January 10, 1840 in Madison, Madison County, New York. He was the son of John Ely Ford (1802 to 1889) and Caroline (McCune) Ford (1807 to 1879). Isaac was one of twelve children born to John and Caroline.

When he was growing up in Madison he learned the trade of mason from his father. Except for his time in the military, he followed that profession during his entire lifetime.

Isaac Ford enlisted for duty during the Civil War on April 20, 1861. He was 21 years old at the time and living in East Hamilton. He served for two years in Co. I, 26th Infantry, New York Volunteers. He was mustered out on May 28, 1863 at Utica, New York. Isaac re-enlisted on December 14, 1863 in Co. E, 22nd Regiment, New York Cavalry. He was mustered in on January 10, 1864 with the rank of Sergeant. He was mustered out on June 28, 1865 at Winchester, Virginia.

In the title to this article we see that Isaac Ford was a prisoner at both Andersonville and Florence. Let's take a look at these notorious Confederate prison camps. Camp Sumter, commonly known as Andersonville, was located in Sumter County, Georgia. Construction of the camp began in early 1864. It was only in operation for 14 months.

By August of 1864 the prisoners held at Andersonville numbered 33,000 in a complex designed to hold 10,000. Adequate housing, food, clothing and medical care were in short supply. As a result, nearly 13,000 prisoners died during the 14 months.

With Andersonville in the path of General Sherman's march through Georgia, The Confederacy decided to construct a new prison camp in South Carolina. This was named the Florence Stockade and was located on the outskirts of Florence, South Carolina. The prison camp was in operation from September 1864 through February 1865. During the time that the camp was in operation, 18,000 Union soldiers were imprisoned there, 2,802 of which died.

To keep the Union soldiers in order during relocation from Andersonville to Florence, they were told that they were to be paroled. Many of those who were unable to walk or not stable enough to travel were left behind in Andersonville.

At Florence, the prisoners were sleeping almost naked and with no blankets. The death rate was excessive, partly because the prisoners had already been weakened by their stay at Andersonville. Prisoners who survived both camps pronounced Florence to be the worst place of the two.

We now return to Isaac Ford and his stay in the two prison camps. Isaac was captured on May 8, 1864 on the first day of the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House, Spotsylvania County, Virginia. The battle was fought from May 8th to May 21st. During the entire course of the battle, the Union lost 2,725 killed and 2,258 captured or missing. Isaac was one of those captured and sent to Andersonville.

The following are direct quotes from the pension file of Isaac Centre Ford:

"I was captured on the 8th day May 1864 and paroled on February 26th, 1865. I was in Andersonville and Florence prisons ... While in Andersonville I contracted rheumatism and heart trouble, but it came on me more severe while in Florence, and while there my eyes gave out caused from the smoke of burning green wood in our shanties. The water would come out of my eyes.

We were almost naked and had to burn the wood to keep from freezing. I had no shoes or stockings or shirt or cap all winter. All I had was an old pair of pants and vest. It took the sight of my right eye that winter and the left became affected but the sight was saved. During that winter I had a great deal of pain around my heart. I was short of breath. I had dizzy and faint spells. The rheumatism took a good hold of me. I had no treatment for my troubles while in prison.

When we reached Annapolis to parole camp, I was in bad shape. I was carried to the hospital on a stretcher. I was reduced to a skeleton, starved to death ... I was in the hospital about eight days and then given the ok to come home. Quite a number of us traveled together to New York City. Then I met a man who helped me get as far as Utica. From Utica I took a stage to Madison, my home. I was nearly dead when I reached home.

Dr. Seymour Curtis was sent for. He came and said I could not live and wanted me to send for another doctor. I told the doctor to do what he could, and if I had to die, why, all right. I managed to pull through."

In another article written in 1916 by Charles D. Hatch and entitled – **REMINISCENCES OF MADISON TOWNSHIP**, he stated:

"Pat Callaghan, Billy Foot, Centre Ford, Charley Dunster, and Henry Hatch came home from the war. Centre Ford and I believe Charley Dunster had been in Andersonville Prison for months and were nothing but skin and bones."

Isaac Ford married Mary Adelaide Guthrie on August 30, 1863 at the Methodist Parsonage in the Village of Hamilton. He enlisted for the second time three and a half months after his marriage. Isaac died on June 26, 1910. He and Mary had three children after the war.

**** All wars are terrible, but a civil war has to be the worst. It certainly did bring out the worst in regard to the treatment of those captured in battle.