

A TRAGIC TALE OF A FATHER AND SON

John Samuel Baker was born in Hardin County, Tennessee sometime around 1819. As he entered adulthood, he found employment as a hired farm laborer, working for various farms in Hardin, Sullivan, and Wayne counties in Tennessee.

At this same time, a young couple by the names of Hosea and Catherine Thornton were living in Wayne County with their 5 children. In 1836, Hosea was stricken with consumption (now known as tuberculosis) and passed away, leaving a widow with 5 small children (Thomas, William, Lewis, Sparling, and Eunice).

At some point, John Baker and the widow Catherine Thornton met and began a courtship which eventually led to their marriage in 1841. To John and Catherine were born 3 children, Jesse, Sidney, and Elizabeth. John treated his stepchildren with kindness and reared them as his own.

In 1849, Lewis Thornton at the age of 22 left home and moved to IZARD County, Arkansas staking claim to 160 acres of timbered land in the area. Lewis eventually convinced John and Catherine to give up their lives as hired hands to others and relocate to Arkansas in IZARD County and stake claim to their own land. John and Catherine along with Jesse, Sidney, and Elizabeth packed up and moved to IZARD County, Arkansas in 1860 --- just before the turmoil and bloodshed of the War of Northern Aggression broke out.

This area of Arkansas along the Missouri-Arkansas border was one of the most violent theatres of the war with many atrocities committed against the civilian population. Although John and his boys attempted to stay out of the controversy and remain neutral, eventually they could no longer tolerate the brutality inflicted by the U.S. Federal troops on those citizens loyal to the official Confederate Government of Arkansas. Sometime in late 1863 or early 1864, John Baker along with his son Jesse and stepson Lewis Thornton all enlisted with Fristoe's Regiment, Freeman's Brigade, Captain Meadow's company of Arkansas Cavalry.

On July 2, 1864, Captain Meadow's company was encamped near Searcy County, Arkansas while on a recruiting assignment for General Joe Shelby. On July 4, Captain David Hamilton led a unit of 55 Federal troops and approached the Confederate encampment undetected. Attacking the Confederate encampment, the Union troops ambushed the Confederates and quickly overwhelmed them. In the brief engagement, the Federals killed seven Confederates while wounding four more. In addition, fifty-six men were captured: one captain, two lieutenants, and fifty-three enlisted men. The Federal troops did not report any casualties. Also captured were twelve horses and mules, fifteen stands of arms, and a set of colors.

One of the wounded was Lewis Thornton who took a bullet to his lower left leg, resulting in a limp for the rest of his life. He was able to escape and would live into the next century, passing away July 15, 1907. Among those captured were John and Jesse Baker.

John and Jesse were herded onto a flat boat along with the others captured and moved down the Arkansas River to the Union Military Prison at Little Rock. They would never see the family again.

Jesse H. Baker would die of chronic diarrhea on October 8, 1864. John Samuel Baker would die of the same affliction, chronic diarrhea, on December 4, 1864. They were buried in unmarked graves in the Confederate Section of the military prison.

Don't ever say this war was NOT a family matter.