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My account of finding my GGpa John E. Yates's Gravesite

After retirement I became interested in my family genealogy probably due to my cousin Wilbur Yates putting together a booklet of same which I helped with by way of finding all the info on my branch that I could.

Upon visiting the Grantsburg cemetery where several relatives were buried and having a copy of Yates genealogy that was produced years ago by someone, I knew that Elizabeth (Roberson) Yates was my GGma...her stone was there but GGpa John was not buried near her... All the obvious questions came to mind...did he skip out on the family...did he outlive her, remarry, and was buried elsewhere?

I got my first clue while reading a little booklet made by his son, John Robinson Yates. He had written a little history of his life in the back (as I remember) and in it had stated something to the effect that when Lincoln issued the call for volunteers in 1862 his father answered the call and gave his last full measure of devotion! That settled it! My GGpa had been killed in the war between the states.

Now came the search to discover his burial site. Naturally I figured he might be lost to us forever, buried in an unknown grave somewhere deep in the south. In my search someone told me I might possibly find a record of him in a book called "Report of the Adjutant General". Sure enough, in the Vigo County Indiana library in Terre Haute, IN, I found him listed with the 38th Indiana Infantry.....and listed "killed by accident" on July 15, 1864! Seeking further information through a library employee, maybe a volunteer, with some experience, he advised me I might find more about John in a set of books named "Roll of Honor". Sure enough....this time it stated he was killed by the falling of a tree. Further info was the fact that he was buried first near Vinings Station, GA, and then was transferred along with 141 others over two years later from that site to the National Cemetery in Marietta, GA.

I had come a long way on the search. Next I made a call to the cemetery and inquired if their records showed him buried there...yes, they had a John Yaaes who had been killed that date and was with the 38th IN infantry. The name was misspelled and I hoped against hope that a visit to the site would reveal that they had made a typo on the records, that hopefully his stone had the right spelling.. Not so! A visit there on our way to FL and eyeballing his stone revealed also the misspelling. At last I had found his grave...it was very gratifying.

Of course, I put the word out to all who would listen the good news of my discovery.

Now I began to ponder whether I should leave the incorrect spelling alone or not. After all, he had been under this stone for over 130 years at that time...and I figured I had been the only family to ever visit the grave. Whether that is true or not, I can't say.

In my quest to do the right thing I consulted with my most senior relative, Cousin Wilbur Yates, as to whether we should pursue changing it or not. We agreed to leave it as it was. I had developed some Civil War Buff friends on the internet by then and told George Bradley of Carlisle, PA of our decision. He replied that I might want to reconsider since it would benefit future genealogists to have the correction, taking advantage of my research. George had proven a very reasonable contact, was even writing a CW book of his own at that time. (He later visited John's grave)

I next called the person in charge at the cemetery and queried her as to the possibility of a change. She replied that they do no changing on the CW markers, except for a continued maintenance program of maintaining height and perpendicularity of the stones. When I told her I had all John's records from the National Archives as well as Elizabeth's pension records from there....she indicated that in this case I should contact the Director of Cemeteries and she gave me his contact info. He was very positive and received my copies which were highlighted for clarity. He replied that in this case they would order a new stone and replace the old one! I asked if it were possible for family to obtain the old stone....he said they had enacted policy prohibiting that since they had found stones being disrespected, used for walks, etc. I thought it wouldn't hurt to go ahead and go for it all...asked him if it would be possible for family to be present when the stone was replaced. He went me much better....told me approx when the stone would be in...they would tell me when it arrived...and then they would schedule the replacement to happen when we could be present! Wow, great news!

I contacted Wilbur asking if he would like to go with me to Marietta to view the operation. Of course he would! After receiving notification of arrival of the stone we scheduled the trip.. Did an overnight, went to the cemetery, announced who we were...they pulled the new stone out of a heavy cardboard box in the back of a pickup truck and had us verify if all the info was correct. It was correct and they had placed more info on than the old one had, a definite upgrade. Ron has placed on the website pics of the stone removal and installing the new one.

An interesting sideline to all this is that later a friend of mine produced an Indianapolis Star newspaper with an article in it about how the National Cemeteries were getting full and the article had a picture showing a maintenance worker on a John Deere lawn tractor towing a cart. In the forefront was a noticeably whiter stone than all the others....I thought, "that's exactly the way John's stone looked when in place....much whiter than the others around". Sure enough, close examination showed his name! I thought, wow, here John's grave was probably not visited for 130 plus years except for the Boy Scouts who faithfully place the flags on them all each Memorial or 4th of July, and look now.....his grave has been shown to the world through the Associated Press!

Hope you enjoy this neat happening in my life! Just imagine all the thrill of these events! Go and do something similar! Thanks for reading.

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