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Interest in family history didn't stop with protagonist's death

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MERCER — Cindy Friend Crytzer had already become so fascinated by the letters penned by her greatgreat grandfather, Civil War veteran Thomas D. Nelson, she wrote a book, "A Civil War Husband: 100th Pennsylvania Roundheads."

But her interest in family history didn't end when Nelson's letters to wife Lydia Jane ended, after he apparently died in the infamous Confederate prison camp in Andersonville, Ga.

Instead, Crytzer continued researching the Nelsons through newspaper articles, obituaries and online genealogical sites.

The twists and turns in the family story include attempted murder, alcoholism, untimely deaths, assault and more.

"Like many other soldiers' widows, Lydia struggled to keep her young family together by seeking a pension from the U.S. government," Crytzer wrote in the book.

In September 1864, Lydia Jane received a widows' pay, being "awarded \$8 a month for herself and \$2 for each child."

However, as a widow and single mother, financial hardships continued, and Lydia Jane sent the two older girls to live at the Soldiers' Orphan School in what is now-known as Monaca, Pa., keeping the three younger daughters at the home.

Seven years after Nelson's death, Lydia Jane married her second husband, George McIlravy, and eventually, daughters Carrie and Anna were sent to the Soldiers' Orphan School in Mercer,

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where they remained until they graduated, left and started their lives.

Due to some healthrelated issues, daughter Belle remained in the care of Lydia Jane and George.

By 1880, George, Lydia Jane and Belle moved to Ohio, where they remained until George died in 1891.

Eventually, Lydia Jane married third husband, William Angemyer, who died eight months after. She then moved to Wellsville, Ohio, where she lived until she died at the age of 77, having outlived three husbands and three of her children.

With some struggling with alcohol, and another taking another man's life, it was only Carrie who seemed to have escaped scandal, marrying Charles Mook on Christmas Eve 1880, moving to the Titusville area, raising their seven children, including Iris, Crytzer's grandmother.

"It seems that my great- grandmother wanted to separate herself from the rest of the family," she said.

Iris met and married Clyde Lee Friend, and they had two children, Clyde Richard Friend, Crytzer's father; and Elizabeth. In 1941, the same year Mook passed away, Carrie moved into a nursing home in Conneautville, where she died Feb. 9, 1947.

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