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'these few lines'

Author's great-great-grandfather describes war in his letters

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MERCER — Mercer resident Cindy Friend Crytzer (left) presents a copy of "A Civil War Husband: 100th Pennsylvania Roundheads," to Robert F. Lark of the Mercer County Historical Society. Crytzer researched the Roundheads, of which her great-great-grandfather was part of during the Civil War, through the historical society with help from former director Bill Philson. Photos by Holly Patterson/R-A

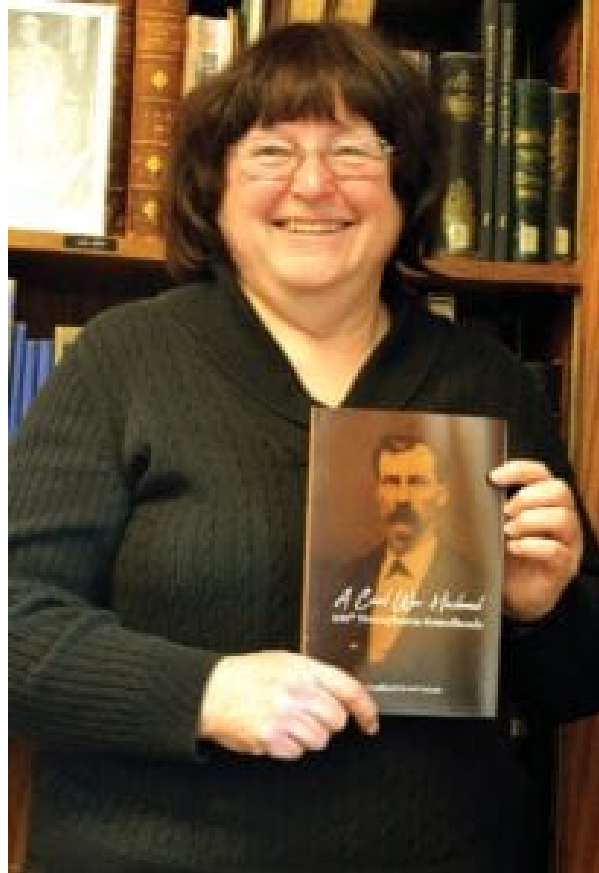
MERCER — In the introduction of her new book, "A Civil War Husband: 100th Pennsylvania Roundheads," Cindy Friend Crytzer explains how her love of genealogy led to a discovery of a family treasure dating back to the Civil War.

Attendance at the annual Mook family reunions has waned in recent years, so Crytzer opted for one last hurrah in 2014 and asked attendees to bring old family photos.

The Mercer resident said that was when she learned about a series of letters from 1861 to 1864 from her great-great-grandfather to his wife and children, written as he fought in the Civil War with Company E, 100th Pennsylvania Infantry, The Roundheads.

“This woman shows up, I didn’t even know who she was, other than a distant, distant relative,” Crytzer said. “We had our lunch, and we were talking, and she says, ‘I have these Civil War letters from our ancestor back in my vault back in South Carolina.’”

Crytzer learned it was Mary Ann Mook Barnum, the daughter of Conrad Mook, granddaughter of Carrie Nelson Mook, who is the daughter of Thomas D. Nelson, the author of the letters. But it turns out, Carrie Nelson Mook is also Crytzer’s great-grandmother.



MERCER – Cindy Friend Crytzer displays her book, “A Civil War Husband: 100th Pennsylvania Roundheads,” at the Mercer County Historical Society.

Barnum and Crytzer spoke about the shared family history, and Barnum sent digital copies of the letters to Crytzer.

Crytzer decided to transcribe them, to share the family history with her own children and grandchildren. But then she thought about extended family.

“At that point, my parents had passed, but my dad would have loved to have seen these letters,” she said. “I have been working on the crazy thing for years, but I sat and transcribed each letter – letter for letter.

“It was more than just history with facts and figures; it showed Thomas’ observations of what was going on around him during the Civil War,” Crytzer said. “From there, it just became the

book.”

The letters start in September 1861, after Nelson departed Plain Grove to travel to Washington, D.C., writing: “Lydia Jane it is with pleasure I set down to rite you a few lines to inform you that I am well and I hope those few lines may find you all enjoying the same blessing.”

Throughout the letters, Nelson spoke a lot about the food he was eating, but also describing what was happening around him, including the condition of his boots: “When i cam to washing on of my heals was blistered I cold hardly walk,” then goes on to apologize about his spelling by saying: “excuses my Bad Spelling and red [read] with Patience.”

In early August 1862, from Fredericksburg, Va., Nelson wrote about seeing two little girls standing along the road, holding hands and crying, searching for their father – a Confederate soldier – that reminded him of his own daughters Frances, who he calls Frank, and Ella.

In a letter dated June 1863, in the midst of the siege of Vicksburg, Miss., Nelson talks about the sounds of the war around him in an area he identified as Snider Bluff, Miss.: “This is the most lonesome place I have been at ... we can hear nothing hear but a continual roar of canons.”

The collection of letters stopped with one dated Jan. 25, 1864, with Nelson talking about not reenlisting.

He returned to Plain Grove on a leave in the spring of 1864, then returned to fight in the war, and, according to Carrie, had been captured and sent to the notorious Confederate prison camp in Andersonville, Ga. – what she described as the “Anderson Rebel Prison” – never to be heard from again.

When Crytzer called Andersonville to ask if there were any of Lydia’s letters to Nelson left, she learned they would have been destroyed when he was captured.

“When I look at this cover, I often think, ‘Wonder what he would think if he knew’” about his letters being shared in a book.

Crytzer continued following the history of Lydia Jane and their five daughters, through newspapers and census records, which she describes in the book as well.

Now retired, Crytzer said she enjoys volunteering at the Mercer County Historical Society, where she learned about the Roundheads from retired director Bill Philson; and the Mercer Area Public Library, where “A Civil War Husband” is available.

The book is available through Amazon and the Web site she established as a companion to the book.

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