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Veterans of Foreign Wars, Illinois Chapter
Commander Leon Barnes
3300 Constitution Drive
P. O. Box 13206
Springfield, Illinois 62791-3206

Dear Commander:

I am writing to inquire about the availability of Government Services as they pertain to the recognition of the service of a veteran of the Mexican War. My specific question, is there a program by which the government provides burial headstones or memorial plaques for veterans?

The person I request this for is my 2nd great-grandfather, John McMeins. I have adapted the following story of his existence using verifiable sources. I hope you find the story interesting and worthy of consideration for any service available.

John McMeins was born in 1823 in Jefferson County Missouri. He migrated to Illinois in 1836 with his father and started farming the land in Adams County Illinois. He married Mary Ann Carter in August 1841 and they had two children. Mary Ann died in November 1859 shortly after the birth of their second child.

During John's marriage to Mary Ann, John chose to join the Army at the time of the Mexican War. John understood his responsibility to serve his country because his father served in the War of 1812 and his grandfather and great-grandfather were patriots in the Revolutionary War, serving in George Rogers Clarks Kentucky County Virginia Militia. John enlisted as a private in the Illinois Volunteer Infantry, First Regiment, Company D, in Captain Newby's unit. His term of service commenced on May 22, 1847 and concluded with an honorable discharge on October 12, 1848. John received a Federal land warrant for his service for land located in Ogle County, Illinois. John did not move to Ogle County but rather returned to his family and farm in Schuyler County Illinois.

John McMeins was an early settler in Brown County, Illinois and established his residence there by 1860 just after his marriage to Eliza Jane Dopp. John farmed the land in Brown County until October 1879. John and Eliza Jane had five children during this time. The McMeins family was struck with disaster on or about October 15, 1879 when John was afflicted by disease or accident and became paralyzed. The family had little resource and was forced to take residence in the Brown County Alms Home. John lived in this home without recovery for almost five years. John's wife Eliza Jane, and their young daughter, Susie, stood by John's side caring for him until his death on August 18, 1884.

Eliza Jane was without means to provide a burial place for John. A generous member of the Bell or Keith family of Brown County provided space for John's interment in the Bell-Keith Family Cemetery. The cemetery is located about five miles north of Mt. Sterling, Brown County, Illinois. John was buried in the cemetery and there is no evidence of a headstone or other marker to locate his resting place. Genealogical records indicate that through time six other unnamed members of the McMeins family were buried in unmarked graves on the same grounds.

Eliza Jane continued to reside in the Alms Home until December 1886 when she moved to Acadia, Morgan County, Illinois. She rented a two-room home with financial help from her sons. Eliza Jane was incapable of working because of her medical conditions and further, her "plushy" stature imposed physical limitations.

In August 1887 Eliza Jane found her way to petition the United States Pension Agency for assistance. Relief for veterans and their families was made available by Act of Congress on January 29, 1887.

Eliza soon learned that the surname she married into presented certain phonetic challenges to the record keepers and clerks of that day. The Illinois State Adjutant General's Office confirmed the service of John McMeans. The marriage certificate Eliza Jane presented to the commission contained three variations of the surname; McMain, McMiens and McMeans. Herein became a great mystery as to the real identity of Eliza Jane's husband. Then there was disclosure that Eliza Jane was John McMeins' second wife. John's first wife, Mary Jane, had died in 1859 and there was no record of her death in the County Records office.

The pension application was turned over to the County Court of Brown County who in turn required that Eliza Jane explain the variations in John's name on legal documents. [It is fair to note that John's ancestors and descendants have suffered similar fate with the recording of their surname.] The court also took issue with the lack of evidence indicating that John McMeins was dead. The court required evidence supporting the death of John's first wife, Mary Ann Carter McMeins. The County had no record of death for the named individuals. It was discovered that there were no doctors available at the Alms Home the month John died so his death was never properly recorded. Mary Ann died in the home of John Bell and his wife, Elizabeth Carter Bell. Mary Ann's death was not reported to the County Recorder.

The Brown County Circuit Court read numerous depositions and heard several testimonies to the effect that John McMeans, the soldier, was in fact the same John McMeins that was married to Eliza Jane. The Court ruled on the facts presented therein that John McMeins, McMiens, McMeans, etc. were one and the same person. This Court determined that John did serve his country in the Mexican War and further that John did die on August 18, 1884 in the County Poor House. The Court was satisfied with the Bell depositions that outlined the death of John's first wife, Mary Ann Carter McMeins.

As a result of the court's decision, Eliza Jane and her young daughter received a federal pension of \$8.00 a month. The pension helped in their support until Eliza Jane's death in January 1906.

As one reads this chronicle, they may wonder what more could befall this family. Well, it seems that the interment records that precisely locate John McMeins' final resting place were lost in the fire at the Brown County Court House. The only records that exist for the permanent residents of Bell-Keith Cemetery are those that were taken by dedicated genealogists that combed the area in the early 1900's.

So, this is the situation simply stated: There is a dead veteran in an unmarked grave in the middle of a corn field in Mt. Sterling, Illinois. History has recorded this veteran as John McMeins, alias McMeans, McMains, McMiens, etc. The records of his death are a simple journal entry of the County Poor House, and the records of his interment have been reduced to ash.

It seems unconscionable that a man, regardless of discipline, circumstance, race, creed or color, should defend this Great Nation only to rest for eternity, unmarked and unknown for his deed. This writer is ashamed that it has taken 122 years for someone to recognize the dishonor bestowed upon this lost patriot.

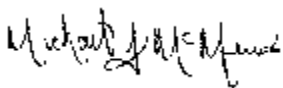
Neither my family nor I object to the purchase and placement of a memorial plaque or stone as a reminder of John's contribution to his country and to his family. However I/we feel that honoring a veteran for his service is a responsibility reserved for the entity by which his service was given.

The flesh of my bones and the blood in my veins bear testimony that John McMeins did live to a successful end and should never be forgotten by his family. History indicates that the lands of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California are part of our nation as a result of the successful campaign known as the Mexican War. John McMeins willingly chose to leave the comforts of his home and family to defend his country during that dispute and his country should never forget him either.

NO ONE SHOULD BE FORGOTTEN!

It is my hope that this saga will help in obtaining some type of grave marker for John. I thank you for taking your time to read John's story and thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,



Michael J. McMeins
Son of Garold L. McMeins
Son of Roy McMeins
Son of William H. McMeins
Son of John McMeins, alias McMeans, McMiens, McMains, Meins, Means, Miens, etc.