

Henry Smith Midkiff (1831-1910)

Confederate Guerilla Escapes the Gallows

By Jerry Long
c2022

Henry Smith Midkiff was born 22 March 1831 near Hines Mill (now Dundee) in Ohio County, KY. He also used the spelling of Metcalf. Midkiff is the spelling that appeared on his three marriage licenses and in the 1850, 1860, 1870 and 1880 federal censuses. Metcalf was the spelling that appears in an 1885 biography, an obituary and on his gravestone. The 1900 census has the spelling as Metcalfe. He was the son of John Robinson Midkiff and Charlotte Smith. His father was a first cousin of the legendary Kit Carson.

Henry S. Midkiff first appeared in the Ohio County tax lists in 1852. He is listed in the 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880 and 1900 censuses of Ohio County, KY and 1910 census of Muhlenberg County, KY. In 1850 he was in his parent's home and was reported to be 19 years old. In 1860 he was living in the town of Hartford and was reported to be the town marshal. He had been appointed town marshal on 18 August 1859 (Ohio County, KY Order Book 9 pp111 & 239). His occupation is shown as farmer in the 1870 and 1880 censuses and as hotelkeeper in the 1900 census.

Biographical sketches of 275 Ohio County citizens were published in 1885 in the subscription book, Kentucky: A History of the State. The following biography of Henry S. Metcalf was one that was included. The sketch contained several errors including the year of his birth, the years of his mother's death and of his first marriage.

Kentucky: A History of the State (J. H. Battle, W. H. Perrin & G. C. Kniffin, Louisville & Chicago, 1885) Ohio County section:

HENRY S. METCALF, Ohio County, was born in the Precinct at Hines' Mill, near Rough Creek, March 22, 1821. His father, John Metcalf, was a man of great energy, and was by occupation a farmer. He died January 28, 1884, at the age of eighty years. His mother, whose maiden name was Charlotte Smith, a lady of fine culture and very industrious, died in 1854. They had amassed some property, and before the war, had owned a large family of colored people. They had nine children — seven daughters and two sons — of whom Mr. Metcalf is the third. His education in school was somewhat limited, but he has learned from observation and experience, and is a fine business man. He has been married three times; first in 1853, to Martha Mitchell, who died in 1855; second to Cordelia Phipps, who died in 1861, and he was last married April 21, 1867, to his present wife, Amelia C. Miller, youngest daughter of Joseph Miller, of Ohio County She was born July 29, 1843. They have six children; Eulia C., John H., Maggie M., Charlotte, Abbie and Rose B. Mr. Metcalf enlisted, in 1862, in Gano's Squadron of Texas Cavalry, and was captured in Morgan's raid and imprisoned at Louisville, at Pomeroy, and afterward at Camp Chase, Ohio, from which place he was sent to Camp Douglas, where he made his escape. He was first lieutenant under Gen. Lyons, and served until the close of the war. He was one of the most active and brave soldiers in the confederate army.

The onset of the Civil War saw Kentuckians against Kentuckians and relatives against relatives. Henry S. Midkiff, and his brother, David, enlisted in the Confederate army (Co. C, 9th KY Volunteer Infantry) on 22 September 1861 at Hopkinsville, KY (“Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kentucky, Civil War, Confederate, Volume 1”, p426). David Midkiff’s term of service was abbreviated when on 22 July 1862 he was discharged due to disability. Henry and David’s Midkiff cousins became opponents by serving as defenders of the Union. Their first cousins, George Robinson Midkiff and Samuel Linsey Midkiff and first cousin once removed, William Peyton Midkiff served in the Union army. The underlying cause for the division was most likely slavery. In 1828 Henry’s father became the first in his family to become a slave owner when he inherited a slave from the estate of his father-in-law, Thomas Smith. Henry’s grandfather, Benjamin Midkiff, before leaving his home in Lancaster County, PA had been a member of the Quaker faith, who were outspoken opponents of slavery. In the year before the start of the Civil War John Midkiff owned nine slaves and his son, Henry, owned one.

Henry Midkiff served with Morgan’s command (Orphans Brigade). While in the service of the Confederacy he was incarcerated four times; twice he escaped and twice he was released. In the fall of 1861 he was confined in the Federal military prison in Louisville for three months until being released. While in Morgan’s Ohio campaign he was captured in July 1863 and was held at the Camp Chase, prisoner of war camp in Columbus, Ohio until he made his escape in August 1863. While serving as a private in company of A of the 3rd Ky Cavalry Henry Midkiff was captured in Nelson County, KY on 19 October 1863 and he was received at the Camp Morton prisoner of war camp at Indianapolis, Indiana on 24 October 1863. He escaped from Camp Morton on 27 September 1864.

By January of 1865 Midkiff had joined up with rebel guerilla forces that were scourging Western Kentucky and terrorizing the citizenry of Daviess, Hancock, Breckinridge and Meade Counties. He was riding with a band of guerillas that included Marcellus Jerome Clarke (alias Sue Mundy) and Henry Clay Magruder, who were accused of many atrocities. In March 1865 they met and joined with the band lead by Capt. William (Bill) Davison. On 4 January 1865 Davison and his command had burned the Daviess County Courthouse in Owensboro, KY. On 24 February 1865 Davison and Mundy’s company as they were advancing east on the Hardinsburg Road (now Highway 144) in Hancock County were intercepted by a band of Union home guard part of a company under Capt. John A. Clark. The party of rebels also included guerillas Marcellus Jerome Clarke (alias Sue Mundy), Henry C. Magruder and Henry Smith Midkiff. An hour-long engagement followed. In the skirmish near Patesville Davison was severely wounded by Charles Hale (c1831-1907), a member of Capt. Clark’s company. Davison was secreted away and hidden by friends; a member of a prominent Hancock County family Davison had many connections in the county. Davison died of his wounds on 7 March 1865. Accounts of the Patesville engagement between the guerillas and the Hancock County home guard were reported in several local newspapers, including Cannelton and Evansville, IN.

Several of the rebels who were with Davison at the Patesville engagement retreated and continued on towards Cloverport. Clarke, Magruder and Midkiff two weeks later on 12 March 1865 were captured in Meade County near the Breckinridge County line. They were taken to Louisville where they were placed on trial for their reign of terror and crimes against innocent non-

military personnel that included robbery, destruction of private property, assaults, and even murder.



Historical Highway Marker near Irvington, KY, in Breckinridge County. Marker is on U.S. 60, half a mile east of Low Dowell Road, on the left when traveling east.



Henry Magruder (1843-1865) and on right, Henry Smith Metcalf (1831-1910). This picture was published in the article, "The Magruder Cemetery

– Part II, by G. Kempf, Gary Griffin & Sherrill Williams that appeared in the Ancestral News (Spring 2014, Vol. 39, #1, Ancestral Trails Historical Society, Elizabethtown, KY, p27).

In their trials Clarke and Magruder were declared guilty. Three days after their capture on March 15 Clarke (Sue Mundy) was executed by hanging. Magruder was allowed to recuperate from wounds received in the Patesville skirmish and was hanged on 20 October 1865. The exploits of Davison, Sue Mundy and Magruder are chronicled in many chapters but little is revealed about Henry Midkiff and how he came to be with the marauders.

The Louisville, KY newspapers carried the following reports on Henry Midkiff:

- Louisville Daily Democrat, 14 March 1865 – Midkiff claims to be a lieutenant in the Southern army.
- Louisville Daily Journal, 14 March 1865 – Medkiff is a fine, stalwart specimen of humanity. He was confined in the Louisville Military Prison here about one year ago, but escaped from the guard while on his way, with other prisoners, to Camp Douglas. He has led a wild life, and we trust he will expiate his many crimes upon the gallows before many days. Clark and Medkiff are now ironed, closely confined in cells in the Military Prison.
- Louisville Daily Journal, 5 May 1865 – “The case of Medkiff, or Metcalfe, one of Sue Mundy’s chums, was tried before the military commission yesterday. It will be concluded today.”
- Louisville Daily Democrat, 24 May 1865 – Henry Metcalf, who was captured some time ago in company with Sue Mundy and Bill Magruder has been arraigned and tried before a military court-martial convened in Louisville and sentenced to be hanged. The execution was to take place on Monday afternoon but we understand Maj. Gen., John M. Palmer has respited the prisoner for ten or twelve days to allow him to prepare for his advent into another world.
- Louisville Daily Democrat, 31 May 1865 – Henry Metcalf: This noted individual, who has been arraigned, tried and sentenced to be executed on the charge of being a guerilla, has had his sentence revoked. He will not be executed at all, but may be sentenced to serve out a term of several years in the Frankfort Penitentiary.
- Louisville Daily Journal, 1 June 1865 – “Medkiff or Metcalf, one of Sue Mundy’s old friends, will be sent to the Frankfort Penitentiary for five years. He was sentenced to be hung about two weeks ago, and then respited.”
- Louisville Daily Journal, 3 June 1865 – “Henry Metcalfe, the guerilla, who was sentenced to be hanged on the 22nd ult., but was respited, and the sentence commuted to five years in the State Penitentiary, will be forwarded to Frankfort this morning under strong guard.”
- Louisville Daily Journal, 12 June 1865 – The guerilla Medkiff, who is now confined in the Frankfort Penitentiary, is sick and lying in the hospital of that institution.
- Louisville Daily Journal, 14 October 1865 – By special order No. 204, the unexpired term of the sentence in the case of Metcalf, the guerilla, has been remitted, and the prisoner ordered to be released. Our readers will remember Metcalf as having been sentenced to be hung on the 23rd of May last, which sentence was subsequently commuted to five years’ imprisonment.

Henry D. McHenry, of Hartford, KY, a friend of the Midkiff family and defense counsel for Henry S. Midkiff during his trial stated that Midkiff was arrested without cause in the fall of 1861 and confined in the Federal military prison in Louisville for three months. Eight months later he enlisted as a private in the Confederate army under the command of John Morgan. He was captured in the state of Ohio in July 1863 and confined in prison from which he made his escape in August 1863, and was again arrested near Springfield, KY and was taken to Camp Morton, near Indianapolis and after remaining a close prisoner until September 1864, he again made his escape. He made his way to Owensboro, KY and there recruited some men and joined the company of Captain James Pratt. He remained in Owensboro for about four weeks. He then went to Paris, Tennessee where he was sworn and mustered as a lieutenant in Gen. Hylan B. Lyon's Brigade and with Lyon's command he came to Kentucky in December. His captain received orders to go to Bullitt County to gather up some deserters and to recruit for the company; they arrived there the last of December. On 16th January 1865 his captain was killed in a fight at Bardstown and his company scattered. During that engagement he saw Henry Magruder for the first time. He then accompanied Magruder and Sue Mundy to Daviess County. After the wounding of Magruder they went to Meade County where they were captured.

Several accounts claim that Midkiff was saved from the gallows by the efforts of his friends, especially those of Col. John H. McHenry. McHenry was a colonel & organizer of the 17th KY Infantry of the Union Army and a neighbor and close friend of Midkiff's father, John Midkiff. This was alluded to in the 1883 History of Daviess County, Kentucky (Inter-State Publishing Co., Chicago, p178) – "Metcalf, through the intercession of his attorney, Colonel John H. McHenry, of Owensboro, had his sentence commuted to imprisonment for five years in the State penitentiary. He was soon afterward released, and is now a respectable citizen of Ohio County." The following item was published in the Daily Messenger (Owensboro, KY, 16 February 1890 p4):

The Central City Herald says: "Henry Metcalf was in town yesterday. He is one of the men spoken of frequently in 'Morgan and His Men,' a book of the war. Metcalf was with Sue Munday and when the Federal soldiers came to arrest them they were in a barn in Meade county. In the fight that followed four or five soldiers were killed but Metcalf and Munday were compelled to surrender when their ammunition gave out. Metcalf was condemned to be hung when Munday was but saved through the influence of friends." It is understood that Metcalf's life was saved by the intervention of Col. John H. McHenry and other Union men.

Henry Midkiff was discharged from prison on 13 October 1865 by order of the War Department. By that point the war had been over six months and efforts were being made to end the carnage and mend fences. In the months after the end of the war several others who had been convicted of being guerillas were also pardoned of their alleged crimes.

On 7 May 1866 Henry S. Metcalf, of Ohio County, KY took an oath of allegiance to the United States and requested that the President grant him a pardon. President Andrew Johnson granted him a pardon on 22 February 1867.

Confederate Applications for Presidential Pardons, 1865-1867:

4594
 Henry S. Midkiff.
 Ohio Co.,
 Ky.
 R. Filed Jan. 30, 1867.
 Left a loyal State.
 Recd of Hon. B. C. Ritter
 and others -
 Executive Mansion
 Washington D.C.
 Feb. 22 1867
 I respectfully refer
 to the Hon. Mr. Ritter
 who will please let
 pardon issue in
 this case -
 By order of the President
 Andrew Johnson
 Secy
 Andrew Feb. 22,
 1867.

Henry S. Midkiff upon a reunion with a fellow messmate in the army, Col. W. G. Welch, was interviewed for an article that appeared in the Interior-Journal (Stanford, KY, 8 March 1887 p3). The article was also published in the Hartford Herald (Hartford, KY, 23 March 1887 p1):

CAPTURED WITH MUNDAY
 Close Call of Lieut. Henry Metcalfe,
 Now a Louisville Drummer.
 [South Kentuckian]

Lieutenant Henry Metcalfe, of Ohio county, made his old messmate in the army, Col. W. G. Welch, a visit Saturday and Sunday, says the Stanford Interior Journal. It was their first meeting since they parted nearly 24 years ago, and they met as soldiers should. The lieutenant was with Sue Munday when he was captured, having accidentally gotten with him as he was making his way back to his command, after his escape from a prison in Ohio. He, Magruder and Munday had spent the night in a tobacco barn, and about daylight next morning a company of sixty-two Union soldiers charged down upon it, but he and Munday, Magruder was lying terribly wounded, opened upon them with their pistols and successfully prevented their entrance. They fell back and sent in a flag of truce by some countrymen who told them that they could surrender or they would proceed to burn the building over them. The besieged men said they would converse with the officer on the

subject, and he accordingly came, and upon his solemn promise that he should be treated as a prisoner of war, Lieutenant Metcalfe agreed to surrender. Munday at first positively refused, but he thinks that upon the same promise that was made to him, he finally agreed to do so. Then they were taken to Louisville by boat, he and Munday being handcuffed together, and all subsequently condemned to be hung by a drum-head court-martial. Munday was hung immediately, and Magruder suffered the same fate after he had sufficiently recovered from his wounds to stand up. By the intervention of friends, who presented indisputable proof that the lieutenant was a regularly enlisted soldier, his life was spared and the war ending shortly afterward he was released. He suffered great hardships while he was under sentence of death, being chained to the floor by both hands and feet and the impress of the irons still show themselves in scars on his limbs. He says the sentence did not particularly worry him, as he had reached that stage that he did not care much whether he lived or died. Mundy met his fate as bravely as ever man did and when taken from the prison on the morning of his execution, went forth fearless of death, though he hated the idea of being hung instead of being shot. He was a regularly enlisted Confederate soldier and was with General Buckner at the surrender of Fort Donelson, as Lt. Metcalfe knows of his own knowledge. The lieutenant, while not traveling for a tobacco warehouse in Louisville, is a prosperous farmer and a happy married man, with a half a dozen or so children growing up around him, but he has never entirely forgiven his enemies and is to some extent at least still as unrepentant, unreconstructed rebel. He is chuck full of interesting reminiscences of his army life with the Major, as he calls Col. Welch, and we enjoyed his talk very much. The Colonel says no truer, braver, better man fought for the lost cause than Henry Metcalfe, and no man showed himself a greater hero during the times that tried men's souls.

In a Courier-Journal article of 23 April 1899 ("A Lucky Stumble That Saved the Life of a Condemned Prisoner", Louisville, KY, p28) it was noted that while in prison awaiting sentence Henry Metcalfe said "My own father and sister are not even allowed to visit me." He was "sentenced to be hanged and from the prison window could see the scaffold as it was being erected."

In the article, "The untold story of Sue Mundy's capture: 'Not a shot fired'" by Gerald W. Fischer, published in the Meade County Messenger (Brandenburg, KY, 10 January 2007) it is stated that Mundy, Magruder & Midkiff were captured while being lodged in the barn of John Cox near Irvington, who was reported to be kin of Magruder. Mundy upon his capture gave his pistol to John Cox and it was passed down in his family. Henry Midkiff ten months after the hanging of Magruder on 20 October 1865 was released for inexplicable reasons and years later visited the site of his capture near Irvington in Breckinridge County. He talked to John Cox and inquired about the pistols of Sue Mundy.

On 11 October 1899 a letter to the editor penned by Henry Metcalf was published in the Hartford Herald. He introduced his comments about the Kentucky governor's campaign by reflecting on his military service:

Hartford Herald, Hartford, KY, 11 October 1899 p3:

HENRY MEDCALF'S LETTER

An Ex-Confederate Tells Why he

has Quit Brown and will

Vote for Goebel

[To the Editor of the Courier-Journal]

Morgantown, Ky., Oct. 7 - Since the Lexington convention, I had, been against Senator Goebel, and inclined to ex Gov. Brown until recently; I have determined to vote for Goebel and the entire Democratic ticket, and would be glad to have you publish this article as my views on the recent campaign.

I entered the Confederate service Under Gen. John Morgan and served from 1861 until the close of the war. During my Service I suffered possibly more than my share, of the hardships endured by a Confederate soldier, having been imprisoned as a prisoner of war three or four times. I also had some very marked experiences with a Federal court martial. I served as a Confederate because I thought the cause was just, and since then I have always voted the Democratic ticket because I thought it right. I was a delegate from this (Butler) county to the Louisville convention and attended every session of that body. I was for Stone. My county instructed, and I voted for Gen. Hardin. I failed to get my choice nominated. I have read the newspaper, and speeches and have watched the campaign and canvass of those who profess to be for Brown, and am now convinced that the Brown move originated, and is supported now, by the personal political enemies of Senator Goebel and the Democratic party, and that its sole purpose is to defeat the party. I believe that the expenses of the Brown campaign are paid by the Louisville and Nashville railroad or some other gold. standard corporation, and that the Republican managers direct the work. Take this town, the home of Taylor, what few Brown heelers there are, when they return from out in the country, make report and caucus with the Republicans, and I believe the same thing is done in every county in the State. I have read the Louisville L and N. papers, and the speeches made by Brown leaders on the stump, and I find nothing but personal abuse of Senator Goebel, which has convinced me that his private and public record is invulnerable. And all this talk about Goebel and his friends casting aspersions upon Confederate soldiers is pure rot and an insult to the intelligence of Democrats. I have known Taylor, the Republican candidate, for many years, and no man has been a more better partisan of Confederacy than he. A dozen Democrats of this county may vote for him. Many more might have done so had it not been for the fact of his incessant and partisan efforts to politically ostracize Democrats of his own county in the past. I am glad to say that most of the Brown men in this section have decided to fall in line for Goebel, and I believe they will do so everywhere, and those who do not will be urged by the L. and N. influence to vote for Taylor, and thus leave Brown with practically no vote in November. It seems to me that the time has come when ex Gov. Brown should rise above the influence of those around him who are actuated solely by personal animosity to Mr. Goebel, and withdraw from a fruitless race, and make the victory for the party that so long honored him overwhelming, because he must know now that he represents an insignificantly small percentage of the party. I respectfully ask my old comrades to stand with me once more against the fast encroaching hand of corporate, greed and Republicanism and save our party, State and home from impending disgrace.

H. S. Medcalf

After being released from prison Henry Midkiff returned to Ohio County, KY. He owned a farm along the road between Hartford and Beaver Dam. In the censuses of Ohio County in 1870 and 1880 his occupation was reported as farmer and in the 1900 census as hotelkeeper. In 1875 he was serving as deputy sheriff of Ohio County. On 2 August 1880 he was elected constable in the Hartford magisterial precinct, composed of the Hartford & Beaver Dam voting precincts. For several years in the 1880s' he was an agent for the Louisville Tobacco Warehouse Company. During the 1890's and the early 1900's he operated hotels and boarding houses in several cities -

in Louisville (1891-1894), Beaver Dam (1895-1897), Morgantown (1898-1899) Hartford (1899-1901) and Central City (1901).

The 9 October 1901 issue of the Hartford Herald reported that “Mr. H. S. Metcalf, who has had charge of the Hartford House for quite awhile, will leave with his family this week for Central City, where he will continue in the hotel business.” Henry S. Metcalf died at the age of 79 on 29 December 1910 in Central City, where he was buried in the Fairmount Cemetery.

Hartford Republican, Hartford, KY

Friday, 13 January 1911 p2:

Henry S. Metcalf Dead.

The Mulhenborg Argus, of Central City, has the following concerning Mr. Henry S. Metcalf, who was well known in this city.

Henry S. Metcalf, aged 79 years, answered the call of the Grim Reaper on Thursday, December 29th. He had been sick only a few weeks and his sudden death, due to heart trouble, cast a gloom over the community. Interment was in Fairmount cemetery, on Friday, in the presence of a large gathering. Mr. Metcalf was one of the best known men in this part of the state, having for many years represented the Louisville Tobacco Warehouse Co. He was a gallant and brave soldier in the civil war, having served with honor under Gen. John Morgan. Mr. Metcalf left a widow and 6 children. A more extended notice of this notable old citizen will appear in a future issue—soon as more data can be secured.





Henry S. Metcalf family lot at the Fairmount Cemetery in Central City, KY
Pictures taken by Jerry Long on 28 March 1985

Henry S. Metcalf married three times. He married Martha E. Mitchell, 21 January 1854 Ohio County, KY. Martha, daughter of Thompson Mitchell & Ann Miller, was born in 1837 Ohio County, KY and died in 1855. Henry married Cordelia Adaline Phipps, 'Cordie', 2 December 1858 Ohio County, KY. Cordie, daughter of Elijah Phipps & Sarah Adeline Nichols, was born 28 September 1835 Ohio County, KY and died on 21 November 1861. Henry had no known children by his first two wives.

Henry S. Metcalf married third Amelia C. Miller, 'Duck', 21 April 1867 Ohio County, KY. Amelia, daughter of Joseph Miller & Helen Austin, was born 29 July 1843 Ohio County, KY and died 25 January 1922 at the home of her daughter, Mrs. E. O. Byers, in Leitchfield, Grayson County, KY. She was buried with her husband at the Fairmount Cemetery in Central City, KY. The 1900 and 1910 censuses record that Amelia was the mother of 7 children, one of whom was then deceased. Henry S. Metcalf & Amelia C. Miller were the parents of – Eulia C. (1869-1899, married Ellis Crowe Taylor & James Calvin Liles), John H. (1869-1948, married Eva Ruth Wilson), Margaret May ('Maggie', 1872-1957, married Edward Owen Byers), Charlotte (1879-1924, married Alfred Ernest Tonks), Abigail F. ('Abbie', 1881-1963, married John Elmer Turner), Rosa Belle ('Rose', 1883-1964, married Thomas Chalmers Finley) and Anna Pearl (1886-1979, married Charles Theodore Sowden).