

John Watson Blackburn (1914-1985)

By Jerry Long
c.2026



John W. Blackburn
(1914-1985)



John Blackburn at his home in Fordsville, Ky.
Picture taken by Jerry Long, 13 April 1981



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 1 December 1963, p.1C:

**Area Members Of The Confederacy's
'Orphan's Brigade' Told About In
Book Prepared By Fordsville Man**

**'Gray Jackets With Blue Collars,' A
Story About Western Kentuckians**



HIS BOOK'S OUT – John W. Blackburn, of Fordsville, has just had published his work on area veterans who fought on the Confederate side in the War Between the States. Entitled, "Gray Jackets with Blue Collars," Blackburn's book deals with the activities of about 150 men who comprised Company C, 9th Regiment, of Kentucky's Orphan's Brigade, the state's lone unit to fight for the Southern Cause.

By John Nichols, Messenger and Inquirer Staff Writer

FORDSVILLE, Ky. - Fordsville citizen John W. Blackburn is quite a satisfied and proud individual.

Last week, the culmination of more than two years work, and the dream of a lifetime was his. Blackburn had finally accomplished what many wish they could do and tell themselves they will do someday.

Blackburn has written a book. It was published last week.

The new author will be the first to say that his new piece is not a work to be compared with any of the best-sellers of the day. He even admits that its circulation is liable to be limited to readers in Kentucky, but it's his book and it concerns a subject that he long ago took to his heart.

Entitled "Gray Jackets with Blue Collars," Blackburn's 114- page product deals with a topic currently popular. It's a work on the Civil War, but dwelling on no specific battles, no political leaders or generals, and putting forth no opinions or theories on the causes and results of the conflict.

So few works have been written about the soldier in the ranks during the War Between the States, that Blackburn felt that it was high time someone looked into this area of the Great Conflict.

Written in the narrative vein, Blackburn's book tells us of the boys from Ohio, Muhlenberg, Daviess, and surrounding counties in Kentucky who gave their allegiance and their blood for the cause of the Confederacy. He follows the 150 men of Company C, 9th Regt., of Kentucky's Orphan Brigade – the first brigade from this state to align itself with the Southern cause.

Of the 5,000 men who enlisted in the Orphan's Brigade when it was formed at Bowling Green in the autumn of 1861, only 1,000 returned to their homes following the hostilities. And these individuals didn't return as a unit, straggling back from the southern scenes of horror as best they could in twos and threes.

The Brigade was purely an infantry unit according to Blackburn, it very likely saw more battle than any other outfit on either side.

Blackburn invested more than two years in research for his book. He admits his experience as a writer is comparatively limited. Having picked up an interest in history and in the Civil War during his high school years, the 49-year-old insurance-man has written a few Civil War articles which were published in The Embury newspapers, Inc., in Leitchfield and Beaver Dam, and in the Central City newspapers.

"Gray Jackets with Blue Collars," was published by the Embury firm. It boasts eight photographs of area Civil War veterans and mementoes. It has a bibliography; it is indexed, and is bound in a hard cover.

"I have in no way made any attempt to throw new light on the Civil War," Blackburn points out. "I take no issue with decisions made by generals or the outcomes of battles, and I deal with the battles and leaders only as regards the lives of the boys I'm writing about."

The idea for this book began to take real form about 2½ years ago when Blackburn, by then considered because of his articles, quite an authority on the Civil War from a local point of view, did research for a lecture he was to make before the Breckenridge County Civil War Centennial Commission.

With the notes for his speech, and the articles he has written as the nucleus for his plan, the long and tedious search for more facts began. Blackburn traveled all over the south looking for graves and battlefields where a hint might be found as to some aspect of the fighting that would be vital to his book on the Western Kentucky soldiers.

"A great deal of my information came from diaries, letters and scrapbooks in the hands of descendants of members of Co. C." Blackburn says. He also spent a great deal of time in the library at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, but most of the time-consuming research was done at the scenes of the fighting.

Blackburn visited Shiloh, twice, in southern Tennessee; twice he went to Stone's River, the scene of a major battle near Nashville, and two times to Murphreesboro, Tenn.; twice located near Knoxville, and he followed the line of Confederate resistance to the advance of General Sherman

from Chattanooga Atlanta. Some of the battle sites he visited along the way are Dalton, Ga., Resaca, Ga., Dallas, Ga., Kenesaw Mountain, Ga., and Jonesboro, Ga.

The Western Kentucky members of the Orphan's Brigade saw action at all of these places. Blackburn says that a very few of the members of Co. C returned after the war. He cites a large percentage of battle deaths.

Two members of this area unit were awarded the Confederate counterpart of the Congressional Medal of Honor for their participation in the Civil War. Blackburn explains that the Confederacy has established the awarding of the honor, but had never formally ratified it or chosen its design. As a result, the men who were to have received the medals instead had their names included on a Confederate Roll of Honor.

Found on this roll are the names of Luther Collins, of Hartford, and Andrew J. Kirtley, of Paradise, in Muhlenberg County.

Scenes of battle are not new to Blackburn. As a member of the Eighth Armored Division, Ninth U.S. Army in Germany in 1945, Blackburn was twice decorated for gallantry in battle. He is the holder of a bronze star with an oak leaf cluster.

Two questions about Blackburn's book and the subject on which it dwells seem to be the most prominent from early readers.

What significance does the title portray? The author explains that the uniform of the members of the Orphan's Brigade were gray with blue collars and lapels. Why? He doesn't know. Speculations about the unit's peculiar uniform – the only one like it among all the members of the Confederate forces – are many and confused, none being sufficiently founded on fact to his knowledge.

Many people wonder about the name adopted by the Kentucky Confederate brigade. Why was it called the Orphan's Brigade?

Here, too, suppositions are varied, the most popular being that since Kentucky was a border state, with leanings toward both sides in the secessionist strife, the name "orphan" implied that the unit was the only one which took an active part in behalf of the views of the south. Blackburn says that his research has not turned up any firm answers to these puzzles.

Blackburn's book is dedicated to his grandfather, a former union soldier who died before he was born. This relative, one of many Kentuckians who sympathized with the Union side, fought with the 26th Indiana Infantry Regiment. Blackburn says that there were many more Kentucky men who fought on the side of the north than with the south.

In summarizing the type of book he has written, Blackburn points out that he tries to get away from the statistics-filled, genealogy-type work that seems to predominate the community history shelf in libraries across the land.

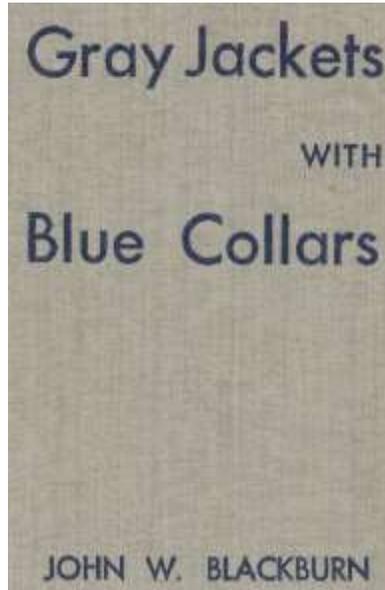
He uses genealogies and burial statistics but only to trace the routes taken by the subjects of his work. Blackburn's favorite means of showing that he's traced a local Civil War vet is to list some youngsters currently living in one of the area communities who are direct descendants of the man. He even deals to a limited degree with some of the area soldiers who were not members of the brigade.

Blackburn is anxious to point out that he has tried to set down a pattern of events in an interesting, eventful, but factual way.

I know that I'm adding little to the Civil War library of this nation," the yearling author grins, "I've written narrative about a small group of Kentuckians who were natives of the locale that I call home. That's all I set out do."



**Gray Jackets With Blue Collars, John W. Blackburn
(Beaver Dam, KY: The Embury Newspapers, Inc., 1963) 113 pages:**



FOREWARD

This is the book that had to be written; there was no escaping it as it was written with a passion and a love for the men and events which have filled these pages. Few authors could do better in causing the reader to vicariously participate in the little known battles ... in the tender personal moments that occasionally fleet across the soldier's lives.

John Blackburn brings his characters to life . . . fills them with blood and breath in this struggle which is as immortal as life itself. His is not just another "history the civil war" but is a story of the way it really happened in a section that is dear to many, loved by more and respected by a few who know it to be so.

As those who have known the boys from Ohio, Muhlenberg and surrounding counties, whether one hundred ago or today . . . or tomorrow . . . will testify to their heroism, their doubts, their hates and their heartbreaks. These pages not only help us to become reacquainted with those who are our neighbors and friends from the past, but to read between the lines to discover why sometimes our brothers are our enemies and we, theirs.

John Blackburn has the admiration and respect of all local Civil War enthusiasts, who accept his ability as genuine. The results of his extensive research with old time residents of this area, pertinent landmarks and authentic records, bears fruit in these pages and will always endear him to the hearts of those whose interest is in this locality.

He does not hope in this collection to submit all the varied experiences of Company "C", Ninth Kentucky Infantry, but those mentioned herein tend to give continuity to the small part which this group of vallient men played in the history of the rebellion.

Earl S. Reid, May 1962

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In making proper acknowledgment of the help which so generously given me by many people while this book was being prepared, I must first mention my close personal friend, Mr. Earl S. Reid, Principal of the Fordsville School. I called upon him many times for information and for advice and he was always willing to help. Mr. Reid and I have spent many hours in discussion of the Civil War and I am much richer because of his willingness to share his knowledge with me. Mr. Reid also honored me by writing the forward to this book.

A writer of a book usually does not fully realize the extent of his indebtedness to others until he begins to make a list of those who have helped. I am most grateful to all who helped me, or who tried to be of help in any way, and if I leave out any name it is by error and not by intent.

Mr. Carlos B. Embry, Beaver Dam, Ky., Legislator, Journalist, Editor, Publisher, and Author of "America's Concentration Camps", read the manuscript. He made many suggestions that proved of value and this book is better because I had the advantage of Mr. Embry's counsel.

Many people helped me much by furnishing information about one or more of the boys of Company "C". Mrs. Mary Laura Wooten, Hartford, Ky., gave me much information about Mr. Pendleton and she loaned me pictures and papers as well. Miss Winifred Simmerman, Hartford, Ky., told me much about James W. Ford and his friends and shared with me also very much that she knows of the "War" itself. Miss Simmerman loaned me books and papers of James Ford and as well some of the pictures that are in this book.

Others who furnished me information about the boys themselves, and for the most part unpublished material, were Mrs. Elsie Bailey, Rockport, Ky., Malcolm Moseley, Whitesville, Ky., Miss Mary Barnett, Owensboro, Ky., Willis Sutton, Fordsville, Ky., Willis Chapman, McHenry, Ky., Mrs. Winnie Hill, Beaver Dam, Ky., and Mrs. Mattie Duff and Mrs. Marie Mitchell, Dundee, Ky.

Not only did people of my home area help but many others did too. M. B. "Mitch" Harris, Hartsville, Tenn., gave me almost a full day of his valuable time and conducted me about the battlefield and surrounding areas where General Morgan made much history during the war. Fred Vaught, Druggist, and Mrs. Beulah Hager, Merchant, both of Hartsville, were most helpful. Mrs. Hager told me the story of the old building now containing her store and Mr. Vaught made available to me a college paper written by his son. This paper is mentioned in detail in the bibliography.

I am further indebted to United States Government personnel at the following National Parks:

Shilo National Military Park, Tennessee
Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Park, Tennessee and Georgia
Stone's River National Military Park, Tennessee
Kennesaw National Battlefield Park, Georgia

This work could never have been completed without the skills and the courtesies of Librarians. I am grateful to Miss Sally Blakely, Regional Librarian, Eighth Region, Kentucky Library Service, for much help and in particular for her kindness in making some books available that otherwise I could not have used. In the same sense and to the same extent I am grateful to Mrs. Reunelle Riley, Librarian of the Ohio County Library at Hart-ford, Ky. Mr. Roscoe Pearson, Librarian, Bosworth Memorial Library, College of the Bible, Lexington, Ky., made available for my use two books that I could find at no other place. Mrs. Sylvia Mercer, Librarian, Breckinridge County Library, Hardinsburg, Ky., was very helpful. This library is in the Seventh Region of the Kentucky Library Service. Mrs. Alma Newton, Assistant Librarian, City Library, Dalton, Georgia,

was very helpful in locating for me material that threw light on the important relationship the Orphans had with Dalton.

One man aided me in ways that somehow cannot be put in words. This is my friend and Pastor, Robert A. Stivers.

Many others have helped in some way and I regret that there is not space for mention of them all. I am grateful to them because it took the many small items to make the whole.

I must express a special acknowledgment to my wife, Fannie Lee and to my daughter Alice. I, of course, have definite obligations to my employer as well as the necessity of supporting my home and almost all of my writing time has been in the evenings. Because my work as an Insurance Salesman requires many of my evenings my work has been done at times that would otherwise have been spent with my family.

Many Sunday afternoons were spent in interviewing people and visiting cemeteries. Fannie and Alice have been very patient and have helped me much by taking notes of conversations and in searching for graves. They have accepted, while yet encouraging me, the many interruptions in the fellowship of our home. Fannie and Alice are a very important part of whatever value this book may have.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 9 August 1964, p.3A:

Western Kentucky News Roundup

Ohio County

An Historical Association has been organized in the county with John Blackburn serving as president. Membership dues will be \$3 a year and anyone joining between now and Jan. 1 will be rated as a charter member. The Association will meet on the second Monday night of each month from September through May with the annual meeting to be held in May.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 11 October 1964, p.4C:

Ohio County Historical Society Meets Monday

The Ohio County Historical Society will meet Monday at 8 p.m. (CDT) in the circuit court room of the courthouse in Hartford.

John Blackburn president, will preside. Charter memberships are still available in the society.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 26 January 1965, p.4A:

Historical Group Sets Sesquicentennial Plan

[At the January meeting of the Daviess County Historical Society]

John W. Blackburn of Fordsville, was guest speaker for the January program. Blackburn is president of the recently – organized Ohio-McLean Counties Historical Society. An insurance man and lay preacher, he is the author of "Gray Jackets with Blue Collars", published recently.



Hancock Clarion, Hawesville, KY 75th Anniversary Edition, 13 June 1968:

The Civil War: County Men Responded To Call

By John W. Blackburn

..... John W. Blackburn was born in the coal fields of Wales, British Isles, in 1845 and was brought by his parents to the coal fields of Western Kentucky when he was two years old. The elder Blackburn had heard of the riches of the coal fields in the New World. When young John was ready to earn his own way in the world he went to Victoria Mines in Hancock County and was there when the Civil War began. He was fifteen years old and had no idea what the war was about, but because he realized his new country was in danger, he crossed the Ohio River at Hawesville and enlisted in the first unit that would take him. This was the Twenty-sixth Indiana Infantry and John became a member of Company F. He served well throughout the war.

When the war was over Blackburn went back to Render Mines, later to be called McHenry, and married the daughter of one of the men who had come to America with the Blackburns. John Blackburn became the father of Walter Blackburn, who became the father of this writer. "Grandpa" Blackburn died in 1908, six years before this writer was born, but something of the love of history must have passed down. It was said of Blackburn that he could not be trusted to go to the coal company commissary for groceries because he too often spent the family food money for books. This was at a time, too, when grocery money was in short supply. The old soldier always loved Hancock County and its people, and one of his brothers, Robert, married Molly Shore, a Hancock County girl. Blackburn is buried at Render Cemetery, at McHenry, Ky.....



Ohio County Times, Hartford, KY, Thursday, 21 September 1972:

'A Hundred Miles, A Hundred Heartbreaks' By Ohio County Author

"My heart has been broken a hundred times in a hundred miles, but oh! the gallantry of my men."

These words were spoken by the leader of the 17th Kentucky Regiment during the War Between the States and are vividly brought to life in John Blackburn's new Civil War book, "A Hundred Miles. A hundred heartbreaks."

Blackburn, an author with a keen and abiding interest in the Civil War, was born in McHenry and has lived in Ohio County most of his life. Author of the earlier, "Grey Jackets with Blue Collars", Blackburn has earned the respect of historians across the United States.



John Blackburn

"A hundred Miles, A hundred Heartbreaks" is the result of more than nine years of travel and research to insure authenticity. In visiting actual sites of events, combing miles of often rugged terrain and little-known and nearly-forgotten cemeteries, the author has literally left no stone unturned to glean accurate and reliable information for this work.

While Blackburn factually exploits the military missions of the gallant 17th Regiment. the real guts of the new book comes with the realism with which he describes the lives of common soldiers... what they ate, the songs they sang, and the emotion they felt before going into the agony of such great battles as Donalson, Shiloh and Chickamauga.

Blackburn's "A Hundred Miles, A Hundred Heartbreaks" is a stirring story of the 17th Regiment during this nation's bitterest struggle and it is written in a manner which makes you feel you were there.

The book tells how the regiment was formed in Owensboro after the outbreak of the war and was immediately moved to Hartford.

From Hartford, the book relates, the regiment engaged in a conflict at Morganfield where the first Kentucky soldier was killed on his native soil.

The regiment then traveled to Calhoun where it stayed for several months before joining General Grant at Paducah. Besides the aforementioned battles, the regiment also marched with General Sherman from Chattanooga to Atlanta.

The book contains more than 300 pages of documented Civil War history and 25 illustrations. It is completely indexed.

Blackburn is himself a veteran, having served in the European theatre during World War II. He was twice decorated (Bronze Star) for gallantry in action. He is a member of the Filson Club of Louisville, the Kentucky Historical Society, and a much sought after public speaker

The author now makes his home in Fordsville and is accepting orders for the new book.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 23 October 1972, p.1B:

**Fordsville Man Publishes
History of Civil War Unit**

By Leslie Hannah, Messenger and Inquirer

FORDSVILLE – When John Blackburn was a schoolboy in Ohio County some 43 years ago, tales of the Civil War exploits of local men were told at family gatherings, at back-porch conversations and in reminiscences outside the general store.

Now almost half a century later, those tales, combined with nine years' research and a lifetime historical interest, have become a 300-page illustrated narrative of the 17th Kentucky Volunteer Infantry, Union Army, 1861-1864.

First copies of "A Hundred Miles A Hundred Heartbreaks" will be released :Nov. 15, hard-bound at \$9.50 each by Nichol-stone Bindery and Publishing Co. of Nashville, Tenn.

An insurance salesman of 25 years, Blackburn, 58, insists he is not a professional writer. When he first began research on the 17th Regiment he never intended to write a book. 'It became a book," he says.

"My hobby is the study of the Civil War but only from a local standpoint," Blackburn says. "I'm not an authority on the Civil War by any standard."

Blackburn's story is of "the young scared boy, the common soldier" whose story is rarely told in Civil War documentaries. "I've written about what they ate, the songs they sang, their emotions going into battle," the author explains.

Blackburn's own combat experience in World War II enables him to write sympathetically of soldiers' fears and thoughts. "I understand that they were frightened but they weren't panicky," Blackburn says. "It's not typical of the American soldier to panic.

The research included study of the soldiers' diaries, letters, old newspaper accounts, and interviews with descendants. Blackburn also traveled "everywhere the regiment went," including the main battle sites of Donelson, Tenn., Chickamuga, Shiloh, Atlanta and Franklin, Ga.

Blackburn and Fred Gipe, Public Relations Director of Citizens Security Life Insurance, Owensboro, the company for which Blackburn works, are optimistic about book sales. Some 500 orders have already been placed. Blackburn and Gipe have sent order forms to certain organizations and persons.

Except for publishing, all work on the book was done locally. The illustrations, 24 full-page drawings, were made by Rex M. Denton of Ohio County. Gipe designed the cover, wrote a preface and helped on publication, distribution and advertising plans.

The foreword was written by Hugh Potter, a former WOMI radio executive. Potter now lives in Florida.



A Hundred Miles A Hundred Heartbreaks,
John Blackburn (Reed Printing Company, 1972) 294 pages:

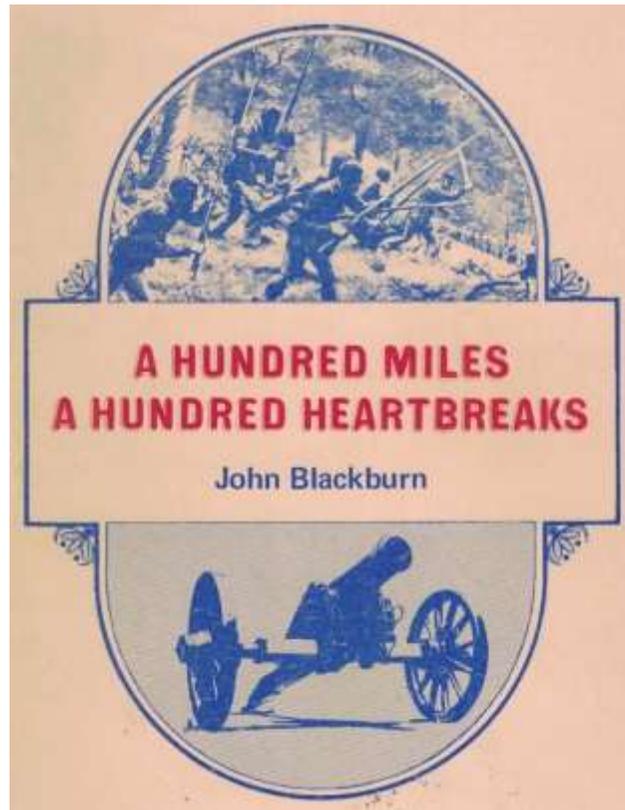
INSIDE COVER

More than a hundred years ago, Americans from two sections of our country aimed their weapons at each other and began the bitterest struggle this nation has ever known. Grand-Sons of men who fought so valiantly with George Washington only 80 years before, faced each other on the battlefield, ready to die if necessary to preserve their ideals. This was the war that both sides abhorred. Brothers, classmates, leaders - men who worked together to build the United States - now became sworn enemies.

For four years this struggle continued. Millions of men, women, and children were uprooted from their homes, jobs, schools. And when the war finally ground to a halt, every one of them knew that America had changed for them as well as for future generations. This bitter war between the states was the turning point in our nation's history.

A Hundred Miles A Hundred Heartbreaks follows the 17th Kentucky Regiment during those war-torn years, through the battles of Donelson, Chickamauga, Shiloh and Atlanta. It tells of the young, scared boy, the common soldier whose story is rarely told in Civil War documentaries.

From its formation until it was finally mustered out, Mr. Blackburn follows the regiment through its finest hour when its leader gave this inspiring tribute, "My heart has been broken a hundred times in a hundred miles, but Oh! the gallantry of my men".



March 22, 1981
To - Jerry Long - a fellow
historian. Not kidding
J. Blackburn

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Blackburn was born in McHenry, Kentucky on May 12, 1914. After his graduation from Central Park High School in McHenry, he served in the U.S. Army during World War II in the European theatre of war where he was awarded the Bronze Star with Oak Leaf Cluster for gallantry in action.

Soon after the war, Mr. Blackburn entered the insurance business where he attained great success as a life insurance salesman.

Mr. Blackburn's favorite hobby is his long-time study of the American Civil War; and for many years he has had a special interest in acquiring information about both Union and Confederate soldiers from west central Kentucky. Mr. Blackburn is a member of the Filson Club of Louisville and the Kentucky Historical Society.

Married to the former Fannie Lee Matthews of Fordsville, Kentucky since 1941, the Blackburns have a daughter, Mrs. Alice Adams and a granddaughter, Susan.

PREFACE

In April of 1865, America lay reddened with the blood of her noblest sons. President Lincoln had just been assassinated. War torn and weary, the ship of state lay anchored while a nation wept.

From those tumultuous times, an ill and wounded America would rise from its knees to achieve a greatness unmatched in all the annals of history.

During the four preceding years, the ravages of war imposed themselves upon the progress and purpose of nation marching through the centuries in pursuit of freedom and democracy. Each day and each month dragged on, as men passed from youth to "old age" almost overnight. Each week held forth its promise that through the struggle would come the reward, the achievement of ideas; and triumphs over tyranny, disease, and poverty of the soul.

The recorded historical accounts of the Civil War are filled with the deeds of the heroes of both the North and South. But little is said of the average soldier . . . the man on the firing line who was the unsung "hero" of his family, his mother, his sweetheart.

The history of the 17th Kentucky is just such a story. The events in the lives of these men could have, and did, happen to a thousand others. Through these pages you'll march with the 17th Kentucky, from the time the regiment was formed until it was mustered out. You'll read the actual names, places, and dates of the events in the lives of these men. Your pulse will quicken as the regiment nears the end of its forced march from Chattanooga to Atlanta, and the tribute of Col. Stout, *"My heart has been broken a hundred times in a hundred miles. But, Oh! the gallantry of my men."*

If you, dear reader, are but moved by this historical work to ponder and reflect upon the fires that burned in the hearts of those Americans who were torchbearers of freedom not only for this country, but for the world, then this story will have been worth the telling.

FRED GIPE

1972

John W. Blackburn, a full-time insurance man and self-styled "non-professional historian", has done a professional job of research and writing in telling this story of the 17th Kentucky Infantry. He used letters, diaries, interviews with descendants of the once young men in blue, added some facts preserved in the Official Records, and turned them into a manuscript that makes their Civil War experiences seem as new as yesterday instead of more than a century old.

The 17th Kentucky was recruited in secessionist-leading Daviess and generally Union-supporting Ohio counties by Colonel John H. McHenry in the early days of the conflict. It fought under Sherman, Grant, Thomas and others of the major leaders developed during this nation's great blood-bath, and lost nearly half of its original enlisted strength due to battlefield deaths, wounds, fatal illnesses and capture in six major battles and numerous skirmishes. When the war was brought to its end, the remaining members of the 17th Kentucky returned to their home state, were mustered out and soon forgotten by all except their immediate families, friends and neighbors. They remained forgotten until John Blackburn undertook the task of correcting history's oversight.

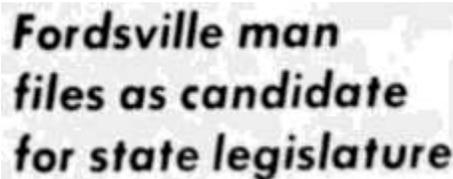
The circumstances surrounding the dismissal from the service of their heroic first leader, Col. McHenry of Owensboro, after he had led them through their baptism of fire at Fort Donelson and inspired them as they fought in one of the most bitterly contested sectors on the field at Shiloh, is a story of special interest the author has woven into the fabric of the story.

Civil War history fans, and especially those in and from Kentucky, should find the reading of this well-told tale a worthwhile experience.

HUGH O. POTTER
Owensboro, Kentucky
June 12, 1971



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 29 March 1975, p.2A:



**Fordsville man
files as candidate
for state legislature**

FORDSVILLE. Ky. – John W. Blackburn, a Fordsville life insurance salesman, has filed his declaration papers for election as state representative of the 17th District comprised of Ohio and Hancock counties as well as a northern section of Butler County.

Blackburn, 60, will be trying to unseat incumbent Willard (Woody) Allen, a 38-year-old farmer from Morgantown, who filed for re-election a week ago.

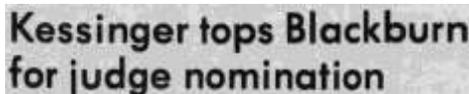
This is the first time Blackburn has run for public office, although last year he was appointed Ohio County Judge pro tem. Allen is serving his first term as representative.

Both men will be running on the Republican ticket.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 25 May 1977, p.1D:

election results – Ohio County



**Kessinger tops Blackburn
for judge nomination**

HARTFORD, Ky. – Theron Kessinger of Beaver Dam received 1,757 votes Tuesday to defeat John Blackburn of Fordsville for the Republican nomination for Ohio County judge-executive. Blackburn received 1,300 votes.

Kessinger, 50, a former state representative, will face Democrat Porter Hunley in the November general.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 16 January 1985, p.2C:

**Ohio GOP chairman,
historian dead at 70**

John W. Blackburn, chairman of the Ohio County Republican Party and a noted Civil War historian and author, died Tuesday at Bowling Green Medical Center.

He was 70.

He was an insurance salesman for 25 years, and during that time developed an interest in politics.

Blackburn, a native of Ohio County, was elected to a two-year term as county party chairman in 1983. He was a delegate to the Republican National Convention in Dallas last year.

In 1975 he was defeated by Rep. Willard "Woody" Allen in the Republican primary election for the 17th District state House seat, and was defeated in 1977 when he sought the Republican nomination for Ohio County judge-executive.

During C.B. Embry's first term as Ohio County judge-executive, 1975-77, Blackburn was judge pro tern.

Blackburn was especially interested in the Civil War and its effects on the state of Kentucky, particularly the people of the Ohio County region. This hobby eventually led him to write two books about the Civil War, "The Gray Jackets With the Blue Collars," published in 1958 [sic – should be 1963], and "A Hundred Miles, A Hundred Heartbreaks" in 1972. Both dealt primarily with local aspects of the war, and with the breakup of families and young soldiers' feelings as they struggled to cope with allegiances to either the North or to the South.

Embry said Blackburn spoke often to clubs and school groups about the Civil War. "He was a very respected member of our community, and his wit and humor will certainly be missed by our citizens," he said. "He was a very accomplished public speaker."

Blackburn was a member of Fordsville Christian Church and was an active member of the Fordsville Masonic Lodge, where he served as past deputy grand master for District 8. He was also a member and past deputy grand patron of Fordsville Order of Eastern Star Chapter No. 326, and was a member of the Kentucky Historical Society.



Ohio County Times-News, Hartford, KY, Thursday, 17 January 1985, p.14A:

**John W. Blackburn, local
politician, historian dies**



John W. Blackburn

A life-long Ohio Countian dedicated to politics and history died unexpectedly Tuesday at the Bowling Green Medical Center.

John W. Blackburn, 70, died of an apparent heart attack after becoming ill while on a business trip in Bowling Green.

An insurance salesman for more than 25 years, Blackburn was an avid supporter of the Republican Party and was serving the second year of his two-year term as Ohio County Republican party chairman. He also was a delegate to the Republican National Convention last year in Dallas.

Despite his interest in politics, Blackburn was unsuccessful in his last two attempts at public office. In 1975 he was defeated by state Rep. Willard "Woody" Allen in the race for representative from the 17th congressional district and failed to get his party's nomination for Ohio County judge-executive in 1977.

Blackburn's closest association to public office was in 1975-77 when he served as judge pro-tem under C.B. Embry Jr.

A student of Ohio County history, Blackburn authored two books, "Gray Jackets With Blue Collars" in 1958 and "A Hundred Miles, A Hundred Heartbreaks" in 1972. Both works focused on Ohio County's involvement in the Civil War.

Blackburn's knowledge of county and Civil War history kept him in demand as a public speaker.

He was a member of the Fordsville Christian Church and the Fordsville Masonic Lodge where he served as past deputy grand master for District 8. He also was a member and past deputy grand patron of the Fordsville Order of the Eastern Star, Chapter No. 326, and a member of the Kentucky Historical Society.

Survivors include his wife, Fannie Lee Blackburn of Fordsville; a daughter, Alice Adams of Fordsville; three brothers, Weldon Blackburn of Louisville, James Blackburn of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and Cantrell Blackburn of Dallas, Texas; five sisters, Ruby Martin, Nene Williams, Isabelle Tait, June Back and Evelyn Perkins, all of Louisville.

Services were held at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at the Han Funeral Home in Fordsville. Burial will be at 10:00 a.m. today in Fordsville Cemetery.





Fordsville Cemetery,
Fordsville, Ohio County, KY



History of McHenry, Ohio County, Kentucky, Shirley Watson Smith
(Fordsville, KY: Sandefur Printing, 1992) pp.382-383:

BLACKBURN

John Blackburn (1845-1908) was a Civil War soldier, who joined the army when he was 16 years old and fought through the whole war. He was discharged once and reenlisted. He married December 31, 1866, at William Espey's home in Muhlenberg County, Ky., to Ellen Espey, daughter of William and Rachel Mitchell Espey. She was born in Scotland and came to the United States at a very early age. John Blackburn was born in England.

They were parents of several children.

Among these children were Margaret Mae Blackburn, Mongo and James Walter. Margaret May was a nun served in World War I.

James Walter (1880-1959) married Iva Mae Watson (1883-1974), daughter of Jerry and Amanda Watson. were parents of ten children. Most of these graduated from Central Park School [McHenry]. They were Adrian, Cantrell, Weldon, John, and James, Ruby (Martin), Gwendolyn (Williams), Evelyn(Perkins), Isabell (Tate), and June (Back), Adrian, Johnny and Weldon are deceased.

Walter and Iva also raised a grandson, Keith Martin, who is a retired doctor. He had his practice in the Ashland area, but now lives in Indiana.

Walter worked in the office of Dr. Lake and Allen, while they were in the Tatum building at McHenry. Iva had a very interesting hobby. She clipped news Items about everyone she knew, and pasted them in a scrap book. She had a trunk full of books when she died. Her granddaughter,

Marchetta Williams became the owner of these books. Many items for this McHenry History have been taken from those books.

[Below] is part of John W. Blackburn's speech at the dedication of the J.W. Blackburn Fire Station in McHenry. This part is concerning the Blackburn family:

BLACKBURN

John Blackburn and Ellen Espey were born in the British Isles. When the Blackburn and Espey families came to Old Airdrie Hill in search of a new life in the coal mines, John was seven years old and Ellen two. John and Ellen would become my grand parents and the same to others here today.

When the Civil War broke out John, then fifteen years old, enlisted in the Union Army. He was in several major battles, including the famous, Battle of Shiloh. John did not have a special military career but he was a member of the first regiment ever to use repeating rifles in military action.

John and Ellen married soon after the end of the war and became the parents of several children, including my father, who was born only a few dozen yards from this point. His birth came a month after McHenry became an incorporated town in 1880. This man, James Walter, would live in McHenry until his death seventy-nine years later.

James Walter Blackburn and Iva Mae Watson were married in 1903 and became the parents of ten children, including me and others who are here today. My father was sometimes called Walter but most of the time he answered to "J.W."

J.W. was a baseball player in McHenry and knew Ray Chapman, the major leaguer who met a tragic death on the playing field. I like to believe that J.W. was a good influence on Ray, encouraging him in his ambitions in the national pastime.

The earliest school I know about in McHenry was the Hamilton School. J.W. attended this school. He was not well educated in the modern sense but he did acquire skills that later helped him and others. He had what some called "good handwriting" or penmanship and he was called upon many times in helping people with paper work.

J.W. entered the work world at age twelve, working in the mines. His job payed ten cents per hour and he drove a team of mules. His work day usually was ten hours. But it must be remembered that a dollar a day in 1892 was not bad wages.

J.W. Blackburn was a strong believer in the miners union, helping to organize locals when the men had to hide in the woods in order to meet. He never wavered in his devotion and support to the miners and all but his youngest son followed him into the mines.

At one period in his life, J.W. worked as a bartender in the famous Espey Saloon in McHenry, and in later years sold advertising materials.

The man for whom this station is named witnessed much of the history of McHenry. He was here when the famous passenger train wrecked only a few feet from where we now stand.

He was only two years old at the time of the assassination of Andrew J. Duncan but later he witnessed several tragedies that are a part of our history.

I talked with my father about the times that were to me the "past". He spoke of baseball teams that included such teammates and friends as Joe James and Sam James. Other teammates were Robert Pollack, J.W. Rowe, J.W. Barrass, Dan Kelley, Ed Bailey, B. Woodruff, Arnest Jennings, Otis Maddox, Hod Taylor, R.L. Render, Peter Burden, and of course others.

Among his friends are Henry Render, Herman Render, Bob Owens, Rusty Addison and Will Lee Fisher. Others were Dick Beck, Ed Nelson Silas Tichenor, and Drs. Patterson and Innes.

And J.W. Blackburn was among those fortunate enough to eat of the good meals served by the famous Catherine O'Brian at the old hotel.

The Blackburn family of which I am a part has been part of the life of McHenry for generations. Though a good family of the same name lives in the area, I am almost certain that the family named in relation to this fire station is the only Blackburn family ever to live in McHenry.

The recognition of this family by officials and citizens of McHenry, in naming this station of the McHenry Fire Department, brings honor to those of my family who have gone, to those who still live, and to all who will come later. I know that my father and my mother would be very proud today.

This station is beautiful and is the accomplishment of the combined efforts of many people who want McHenry to be a better and a safer place to live.

My brother Adrain gets his mail at McHenry and is here almost every day and I live in this county and am in my old home town many times each year. Others of my family are often here.

In Render Cemetery lie my father and my mother and there also lies my father's father and mother.

May this fire station render long and good service to the people of this town and this area, and may the man honored by its name not be forgotten in our midst.

Also resting in Render Cemetery are three of my father's sisters and three of his brothers. And there also sleep two sons-in-law of my parents. A few feet from my mother lie two of her brothers.

These folk were a part of this good town and the town is a part of them and this will ever be so.

A good part of our 100th year celebration was a song that was composed and sung by Peggy Shields. We are favored with her singing this as a part of this observance.

I think this song expresses a sentiment shared by the entire Blackburn Clan.

McHenry, McHenry, how we love you

We'll honor, protect you

And always be true.



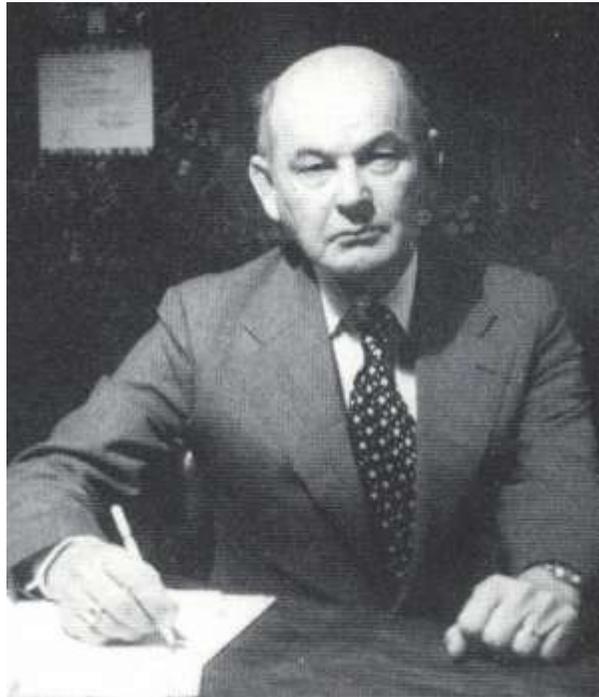
Ohio County, Kentucky Pictorial History
(Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 1998) p.104:



Civil War veteran, John Blackburn.
Buried Render Cemetery



Ohio County, Kentucky Pictorial History Volume II
(Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 2000) pp15 & 62:



John Blackburn, Fordsville historian & author



McHenry Basketball Team, 1933. Top Row, L-R: D. Gish (coach), Noble Sandefur (guard), Cautrell Blackburn (guard), Simon James (forward), Clarence Raymond (forward), Martin Hess (forward). Second Row: Johnny Blackburn (forward), Mallam Lake (guard), Mitchell Maddox (center).



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